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Test and Improve Your Chess

Numerical Evaluation and Other Improvement Techniques

by

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Contents

Introduction

THIS book is designed to help chess players, from beginners to Masters, to improve their understanding of chess and thus their performance at the board. In the first, 'theoretical' part of the book (Chapters 1-5) I introduce, in a manner fashioned by Alexander Kotov in his best-seller *Think Like a Grandmaster,* some effective and not very well-known methods of achieving these goals.

The core of this part is a system of numerical evaluation and a related method of chess graphs. Starting with Igor Bondarevsky and Leonid Shamkovich, many Grandmasters have adopted numerical evaluation of chess positions as an effective goal for achieving more precise judgements; my contribution lies in connecting those previously 'empty' numbers with a predicted outcome of games played from those positions.

The second part of the book, in a format of Question and Answer Games and Excercises, is for the reader's training. When using examples from my own chess practice, I try to reconstruct my thoughts at the most crucial moments of the game, and thus enable the reader to understand better a Grandmaster's thinking, and to follow this example himself. And finally, in the last chapter I discuss how to study openings, and give analyses of the main lines in my favorite opening, the Benko Gambit.

This book is based on articles written and analytical research carried out together with the American Senior Master Jeffrey Kastner. It is difficult to overestimate his role. I also appreciate the support received from the Pergamon 'team' — *Acquisitions Editor* Catherine Shephard and *Chess Editor* Ken Neat, whose contribution, in terms of both time and ideas, should be described as monumental.

LEV ALBURT
New York City
Two-time U.S. Chess Champion

1

The Road to Better Evaluation

The ability to analyze a position properly is one of the most important qualities of a good chess player, yet there are few aspects of the game that the average player seems to find more baffling.

Analysis (in chess or any other scientific endeavor) is basically a two-stage process. First comes the search for possible alternatives ('candidate moves') and their likely continuations ('variations'). This step is commonly referred to as **Calculation** or **Analysis.** Exercises to improve your Calculation are given in Chapters 6-9 of this book. For the present, the following practical advice will suffice.

In **open** positions, particularly those abounding in sharp tactics, you should strive to calculate as many concrete variations and subvariations as can be logically considered within the confines of a self-imposed time limit. On the other hand, when a position is **closed** and there is no immediate contact between the opposing forces, your calculations should be founded more on broad strategic considerations.

Regardless of how far ahead you are able to calculate variations, at some point you must pause to reflect on their merits. After Calculation, the key positions stemming from each candidate move are appraised in terms of which are favorable and which are unfavorable. This second step, **Evaluation, must be learned and performed consciously by every chess player.**

The Elements of Evaluation

What factors determine whether White or Black stands better in a given position? The answer is vital, for without a proper set of standards to apply, Evaluation becomes mere guesswork. As a guide, we list here some of the more common elements of Evaluation. These elements are divided into two groups: the strong, those which tend to increase a player's overall advantage, and the weak, those which normally lead to an overall disadvantage. Note that many of the weak elements are essentially reverse forms of their strong counterparts.

Strong Elements

Material Superiority (greater force).

Rapid Development (ahead in tempi).

Space Advantage (greater board room).

Initiative (the ability to create threats, be they immediate tactical threats or long-range positional ones).

Attack (a direct assault on the opponent's pawns, pieces, weaknesses or king).

King Safety (more secure king position).

Piece Activity/Mobility/Coordination (includes: bishop pair, good bishop v. bad knight or good knight v. bad bishop, doubled rooks on the 7th rank, control of open or semi-open files and diagonals, flexibility, effective blockade, centralized pieces, pins, batteries, active king in the endgame, having the opposition, etc.).

Pawn Structure (includes: preponderance of center pawns, control of the center, phalanx, united pawns, strong pawn chains or complexes, pawn roller, mobile majority, minority attack, strong points, passed pawns - especially protected and/or outside ones, strong outpost squares, etc.).

Weak Elements

Material Deficit.

Lag in Development.

Cramped Position.

Passive Position.

On the Defensive.

Exposed King.

Limited Piece Activity/Mobility/Coordination (includes: bad bishop, knight on the rim, pinned pieces, trapped pieces, decentralized pieces, being in zugzwang, etc.).

Pawn Structure (includes: doubled or tripled pawns, isolated pawns, backward pawns, hanging pawn duo, isolated couplet, split pawns, blockaded pawns, fixed pawns, multiple pawn islands, crippled pawn majority, weak pawn minority, weak squares or holes, targets, etc.).

Be sure to consult a reputable chess primer for those elements with which you are unfamiliar, and pay particular attention to the illustrative examples. Your mastery of the elements may be reinforced by examining positions from your own games and identifying their strong and weak elements. Then, graduate to more sophisticated games played and analyzed by grandmasters, comparing your evaluations with those of the annotator. Eventually you will not only gain sufficient experience in spotting the inherent elements of any position, but you will also learn how to weigh these elements against one another, recognise their relative effect on the situation at hand, and draw a well-informed conclusion from this data.

Using the Elements Effectively

In chess, as in war, the more powerful army will usually triumph. Because material is such an important consideration in Evaluation, beginners are taught a simple point-count system. Most square-rite

ytical technique. With regular practice and study, his evaluations will also steadily improve. More will be said about this topic later.

Symbolism and Terminology

In chess literature, assessments are commonly expressed in symbolic form. The most common are defined as follows:

+-	White has a decisive advantage.
±	White has a clear advantage.
±	White has a slight advantage.
=	The chances are equal.
∓	Black has a slight advantage.
∓	Black has a clear advantage.
-+	Black has a decisive advantage.

Individual moves of a game also carry assessment symbols: ! - a good move; !! - a very good move; ? - a weak move; ?? - a blunder; !? - an interesting or provocative move, often involving some risk; ?! - a dubious move.

These move symbols represent the boos, hisses, hurrahs and hallelujahs of chess. They add color and texture to any annotated game, but they are not absolutely necessary in Evaluation. This is because the merits of a specific move must always be judged in relation to the key positions they are bound to create in Analysis. Therefore, **positional** Evaluation is the focus of our research.

Symbols are very popular with the publishing industry, for several reasons:

First, they have achieved historical acceptance and worldwide adherence.

Second, they eliminate the need for routine verbal definitions, thus conserving valuable space on the printed page.

Finally, they overcome the language barrier that would normally restrict the larger international circulation of such sources as *Chess Informator* or the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings.*

If you are like most chess players, you probably have never found reason to quibble with any of the above symbols or their definitions; you have learned to accept them unconditionally, the way generations before you also have. For the average player, however, symbols may create more problems than they solve. Consider the following:

(A) *Symbols alone do not supply enough information*

Games that are annotated purely with symbols, without any accompanying text, tend to confuse the average player. Symbols do indicate who stands better, but the essential elements which contributed to the assessment are left for the hapless student to deduce for himself.

To partially rectify this drawback, *Informator* and *E.C.O.* have

introduced additional symbols to represent a few of the more common elements such as space, development and pawn structure. I would advise, however, that until you gain sufficient knowledge and experience with Evaluation, you confine your chess studies to games annotated by grandmasters in verbal form.

(B) *The definitions lack uniformity*

Verbal assessments such as "White has a decisive advantage" are often interpreted in different ways, depending on the level of a player's skill. For instance, a grandmaster would require much less of an advantage than would a novice, in order to conclude that a given position is winning. A standard must be established.

(C) *The symbol '!?' is often misunderstood*

We have seen '!?' defined in various ways: a move deserving consideration, a double-edged move, an enterprising move, a risky move, a provocative move, a move that may not be sound, an interesting move. What is the student to infer from these sundry descriptions? Is a move rated with a '!?' to be considered good, or bad, or both good and bad, or downright obscure? Sometimes only the annotator knows for sure.

(D) *The equality symbol is frequently misleading*

So often in annotated games, the evaluations of positions end up with the '=' sign. Should the reader think that the game is evenly balanced or drawish? If so, is it a **practical equality,** where the position is so simple and clear that it is impossible for either side to lose? Or is it a **theoretical equality,** where a draw will result provided that the inferior side defends perfectly? On the other hand, could the game be in a state of **dynamic equilibrium,** in which case both sides enjoy equally good winning chances? Clearly, the '=' sign alone is not sufficient for most readers.

(E) *The symbols do not accurately reflect varying degrees of advantage or disadvantage*

In your reading, you have probably encountered the expressions: 'White stands a little better', 'White has obtained a small edge', and 'White's advantage is almost clear', Although these three phrases are meant to distinguish between progressively increasing slight advantages to White, they would all receive the identical ± sign in *Informator* or *E.C.O.* This fault could be easily corrected by inventing new symbols, such as $\pm$ $\pm$, but this would obviously be an impractical solution.

Improving upon the System

At this point, the astute reader might well be asking himself, 'Instead of using symbols, wouldn't it be better to assign each position

undergoing assessment a specific numerical value instead?' The answer is 'yes', and in fact it is the very method being employed by the current generation of computer programs and by several top grandmasters.

Computers carry this system to extremes, though. They first assign precisely formulated values (fed to them by fallible **human** programmers - that's the major flaw!) to each of the inherent elements of a given position, and then they synthesize all of the mathematical data gathered from each routine and subroutine to finally derive an exact numerical assessment. We do not recommend this particular method to you, however. Let's face it, humans are simply not geared for thinking in the same **objective** manner as our electo-mechanical rivals. Human reasoning, as we mentioned earlier, is **subjective** in nature. To a great extent, our thoughts and actions are governed by emotion, experience and prejudice.

Fortunately, a logical and practical system for improving your ability at Evaluation does exist. It still relies heavily on variables such as intuition, skill, experience, style and personal taste, but at least your assessments will take on more meaning and consistency than ever before.

I call it 'The System of Predicted Results'. Its premise is that any position may be assigned a numerical value based upon **the estimated number of points that White is predicted to score out of ten games played from that position between two grandmasters of equal strength.** If, for example, White has an absolutely winning position, the numerical value is 10.0. Conversely, a totally lost position for White is evaluated at 0.0, while a dead draw is exactly 5.0. The number 10.0 is used as the base because it is obviously the easiest to work with.

GM games are used as standards because they represent the current 'state of the art'. (Should computers someday attain a level of chess omniscience, as some experts prophesy, our role models may change!) Therefore, in a position where White has king, bishop and knight against Black's lone king, the value is 10.0, despite the fact that this ending is often drawn at the non-GM level.

For a position which is not a clear win, loss or draw, there are two practical methods of gauging the predicted result: Statistics and Extrapolation.

Statistics is the science dealing with the collection and tabulation of relevant data. Whether or not you realize it, those of you who are tournament competitors have been directly affected by Statistics via the ELO Rating System or some other similar system. Based on statistical surveys, Professor Arpad Elo, the originator of the USCF and FIDE rating formulae, tabulated the predicted results of games contested by players of varying strengths and ratings. The statistical

chances of any one player beating or drawing with another are reflected in the number of rating points that change hands after a game.

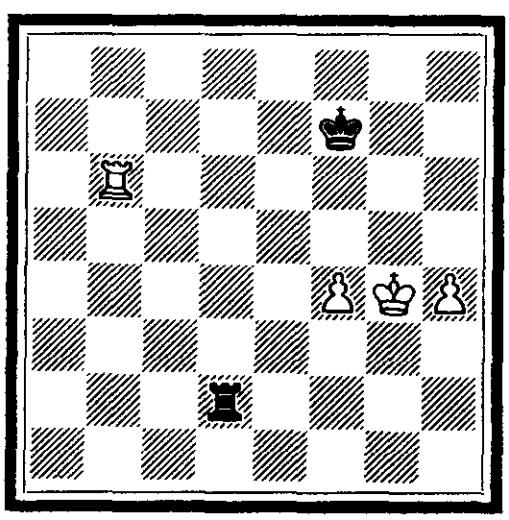
Statistics show that for every 10 GM games played nowadays, White wins three, draws five, and loses two. We may thus deduce that the initial position of any chess game (before White's first move is made) has a value of 5.5. This hypothesis is supported by the generally accepted theory that White always starts off with a slight edge.

Statistics also indicate that many so-called 'theoretical draws' would be more accurately assessed by measuring predicted results in over-the-board competition. To illustrate our point, we ask you to examine the following diagram position *(1)*.

Browne-Shamkovich

USA Championship, 1981

1



Position after 60 h4

White won on move 107

This type of ending, which features king, rook and f- and h-pawns, or a- and c-pawns (still on the fourth rank) v. king and rook, is regarded as a theoretical draw by all the endgame books. Yet in actual GM praxis it is often won by White.

Unfortunately, most chess positions have little or no statistical background on which to base your predicted results. They must, therefore, be assessed by means of Extrapolation, estimating the numerical values from the essential elements. Here again, you will be calling upon your powers of intuition and abstract reasoning (hence the popularity of annotations such as 'the position is unclear') qualities which you can improve through study and play. By going over the notes to games played and analyzed by GMs, you will grad-

ually inherit their knack of associating different assessments with various kinds of positional factors.

You may use the following table as a general guide for converting some of chess literature's favorite symbols and terminology into more meaningful numerical values.

Terminology	Symbol	Values
Equal game, balanced position, even chances drawish, etc. As I stated earlier, positions in this category vary widely - from evenly balanced or drawing ones (where the predicted result might be 8 draws, 1 win and 1 loss), to dynamically equal ones (producing, perhaps, 4 wins, 4 losses and 2 draws).	=	5.0
White (Black) stands a little better, has a small edge, has a slight advantage, etc.	± (∓)	5.5 (4.5) 6.0 (4.0)
White (Black) stands clearly better, has the upper hand, has a favorable position, has a concrete advantage, has a solid plus etc.	± (∓)	6.5 (3.5) 7.0 (3.0)
White (Black) has a big advantage, has a superior position, is firmly in command etc.	± (∓)	7.5 (2.5) 8.0 (2.0)
White (Black) has a nearly decisive advantage, is practically winning, has the vastly superior position, etc.	± (∓)	8.5 (1.5)
White (Black) has a decisive advantage, overwhelming game, winning position, etc., but some technique is still required.	+- (-+)	9.0 (1.0) 9.5 (0.5)
White (Black) has an absolutely decisive advantage, has an easily winning position, the game is nearly over, victory is certain, the opponent can safely resign, etc.	+- (-+)	10.0 (0.0)

The System of Predicted Results even provides us with improved definitions for move symbols. The following table applies to symbols appearing after moves by White; simply reverse the definition for Black moves.

Symbol	Definition
!!	A brilliant move, extraordinary shot, extremely hard-to-find move, etc. Such a move increases for practical purposes the numerical value.
!	The best move, a good move, the only move, etc. Such a move maintains the previous value and maximizes the chances for future increases in value.
!?	A double-edged move (etc.) which does not effect the overall

value, but does alter the projected win/loss/draw ratio. For example, a position with a value of 6.0 might be based on a predicted result of 2 wins and 8 draws. After a !? type of move, the value would remain at 6.0, but White may win 5, lose 3, and draw only 2 games. Moves that merit a !? sign are usually played in must-win situations - when a draw does little or no good. They are, therefore, often affixed to unclear sacrifices, hyperactive sorties, or moves which maximize 'cheapo potential'. (Cheapo is not one of the Marx Brothers; the term is chess slang and denotes a swindle!).

?! A *dubious move, questionable move, not quite correct move,* etc. Such a move might lower the value by 0.5 or 1.0 points.

? A bad move, mistake, error, etc. *Such a move lowers the value* by approximately 1.0 to 2.0 points.

?? A very bad move, outright blunder, terrible mistake, decisive error, etc. Such a move greatly decreases the value - by at least 2.0 points and often much more.

You will recall that the initial position of a chess game is rated at 5.5. White can be certain of maintaining this value by playing 1 e4, 1 d4, 1 c4 or 1Nf3, all of which have been statistically linked to slightly better chances for White. An unenterprising move such as 1 c3?!, for example, would reduce the game to immediate equality, and the position is therefore rated at 5.0. Even worse for White would be 1 f3? (value of the position = 4.0), and if 1 . . . e5 (value = 4.0) 2 g4?? (value = 0.0) 2 . . . d5?? (value 2.5) Black still has a superior position, despite overlooking 2 . . . Qh4 mate. More sophisticated examples will be given in Chapter 2.

I will also be introducing you to **Chess Graphs,** an innovative, simple, useful and highly visual tool of Evaluation.

Recommended Reading

Think Like a Grandmaster by Kotov (general treatise on Analysis).

Learn Chess: A New Way For All by Alexander & Beach (basic primer covering the elements of Evaluation).

Complete Chess Strategy by Pachman and **The Elements of Chess Strategy** cassettes by Evans (slightly more advanced treatments of the elements).

Botvinnik's 100 Selected Games by Botvinnik, **Paul Keres Chess Master Class** by Neishtadt and **Zurich 1953** by Bronstein (good sources of well-annotated GM games).

The Art of Attack in Chess by Vukovic and **Test Your Chess IQ** by Livshitz (mating and combinational patterns).

Chess Endings: Essential Knowledge by Averbakh, **A Guide to Chess Endings** by Euwe and Hooper, and **Endgame Stategy** by Shereshevsky (endgame patterns).

2

Chess Graphs

I should now like to introduce you to an innovative, simple-to-use and highly visual tool of Evaluation.

In the previous chapter I discussed some of the elements, symbols, terminology and methodology of Evaluation, concluding with an explanation and demonstration of the 'System of Predicted Results'. I hope that you have had the chance to study and practise this quantitative method of positional assessment.

Herewith, I acquaint you with **Chess Graphs** - visual aids which will improve your overall understanding of analysis, especially numerical assessments. In addition, chess graphs will aid your study and retention of chess positions and games.

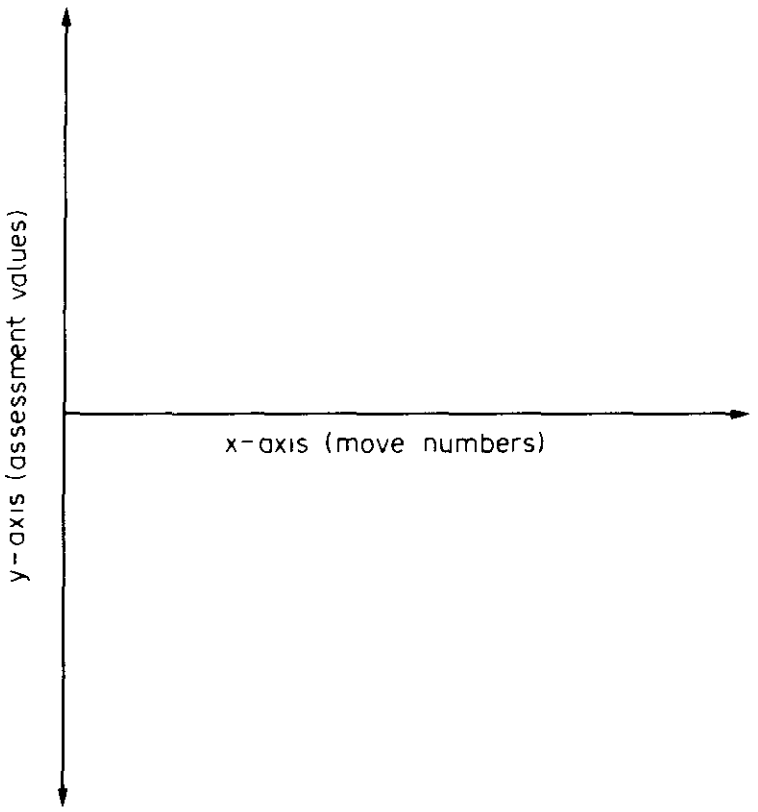
What is a Chess Graph?

A chess graph is basically a pictorial representation of an annotated chess game. A series of connected points (sometimes called coordinates) depict a game's fluctuating tide and continuous flow of action.

Chess 'graphiti' came into being in 1972, when grandmaster Leonid Shamkovich developed a concept and design for the first chess graph. Years later, well after his emigration from the USSR to the USA, Shamkovich integrated his theories on the subject with some novel ideas by Jeffrey Kastner. The duo collaborated on a short article about chess graphs, published in *Chess Life*, February 1980. Since then, I have made additional refinements, incorporating the predicted results system into the chess graph. And I am pleased to unveil this 'new and improved' version to you.

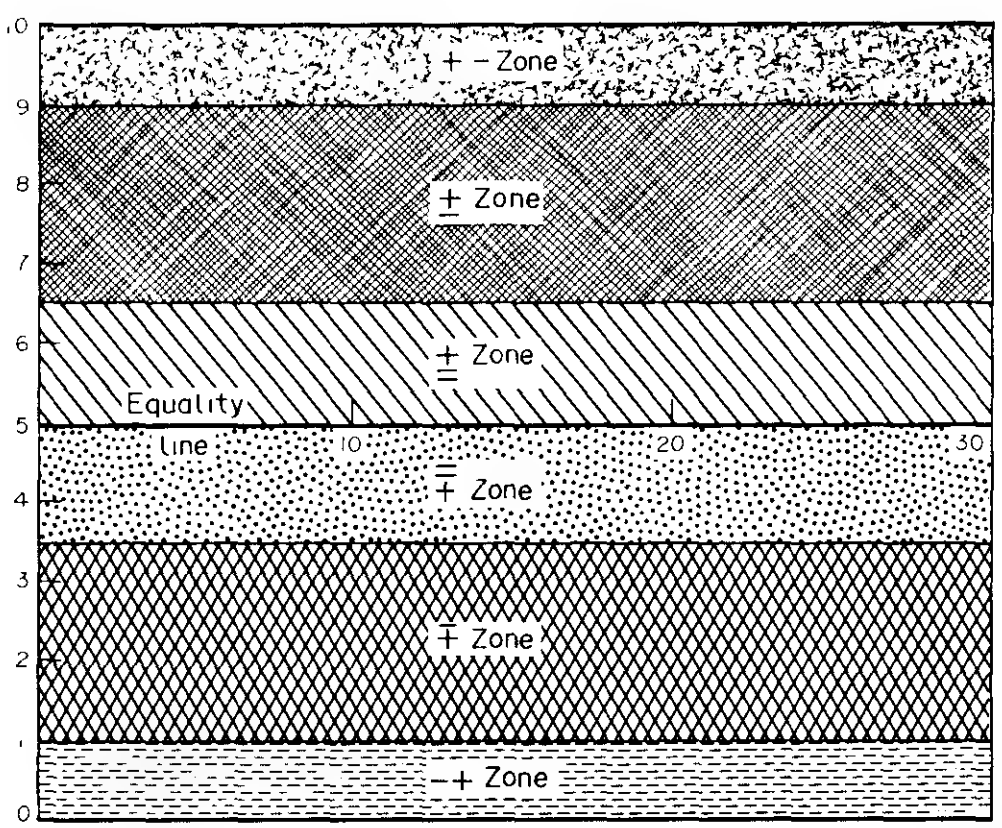
The Format of a Chess Graph

A chess graph is similar in design to any graph used in a high school geometry class or a corporate business meeting. Each graph



Graph I

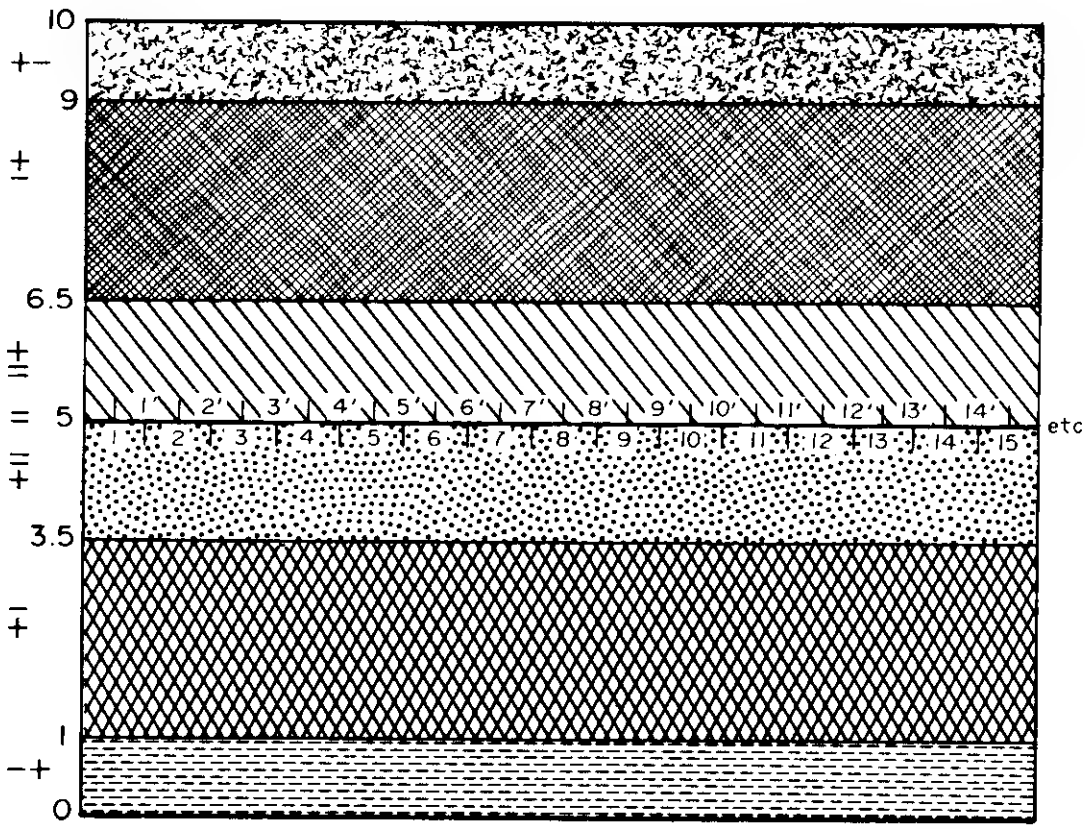
contains a main horizonal line, called the x-axis, and a main vertical line, called the y-axis. As shown in Graph I, the x-axis records the move numbers in a game, while the y-axis gauges the assessment values.



Graph II

Graph II represents the standard chess graph; you can quite easily reproduce it for yourself using ordinary graph paper and a ruler. The x-axis can be widened as much as is necessary to accommodate all the moves in a game.

Labelled clearly here are the six distinct **assessment zones** and the **equality line** which splits them in half. I have subdivided the graph in this manner, mainly for the convenience of those readers who are used to the symbols ⩲, ±, etc. With experience, you should be able to eliminate the assessment zones from your consciousness and focus instead on the more meaningful numerical values which border the y-axis.



Graph III

In Graph III the numbers located below the x-axis refer to positions reached after White moves, and the numbers above, marked with prime (′) signs, refer to positions reached after Black moves. The highly detailed x-axis in this graph is especially useful for plotting complex battles with numerous tactical twists and turns.

Making your Points

A single point on a chess graph represents the numerical assessment value of the concrete position reached after a player's move (but before his opponent's reply). Because White's predicted result is said to be 5½ points out of every 10 grandmaster games contested, the initial point on every graph (before White even plays his first move) is situated on the y-axis at the 5.5 level.

Any point located directly on the x-axis (also known as the 5.0 level or equality line) shows that the position is equal or drawish at that very moment. Points plotted at different intervals within the same zone denote varying degrees of advantage or disadvantage.

When you make a graph of a game, especially a complicated one, it is essential that you first plot its critical points, the coordinates which correspond to the most crucial moments of the battle. The critical points not only outline the general pattern of action, but also draw attention to significant changes in the assessment values.

Once these critical points have been entered, as much detail as possible should be added; the graph should reflect slightly inaccurate moves as well as subtle changes in the position. Extremely ambitious or technically-minded graphers may wish to plot exact coordinates for each and every move. Although this procedure is not absolutely necessary for most types of games, I do recommend it as a good way of practising your graphing technique and exercising your analytical ability.

All points on the graph are connected by a continuing series of line segments, and ½-½, 1-0 or 0-1 is placed directly after the final point to indicate the result of the game. If the game was won because of a time forfeit, the decisive result sign may be enclosed within a box (e.g. 1-0 or 0-1). A box surrounding a specific point on the graph shows that the game was adjourned at that precise moment. Points may also be labelled with lower case letters of the alphabet for easy reference to accompanying annotations.

A Basic Example

To help you understand better the mechanics of chess graphs, examine the following graph of a very short game played by two beginners.

Each move of the game will be annotated, so that the logic of the graph can be easily followed; you will also be able to refresh your memory on Evaluation and simple Calculation procedures. The letters to the left of each move below correspond to points similarly marked on Graph IV.

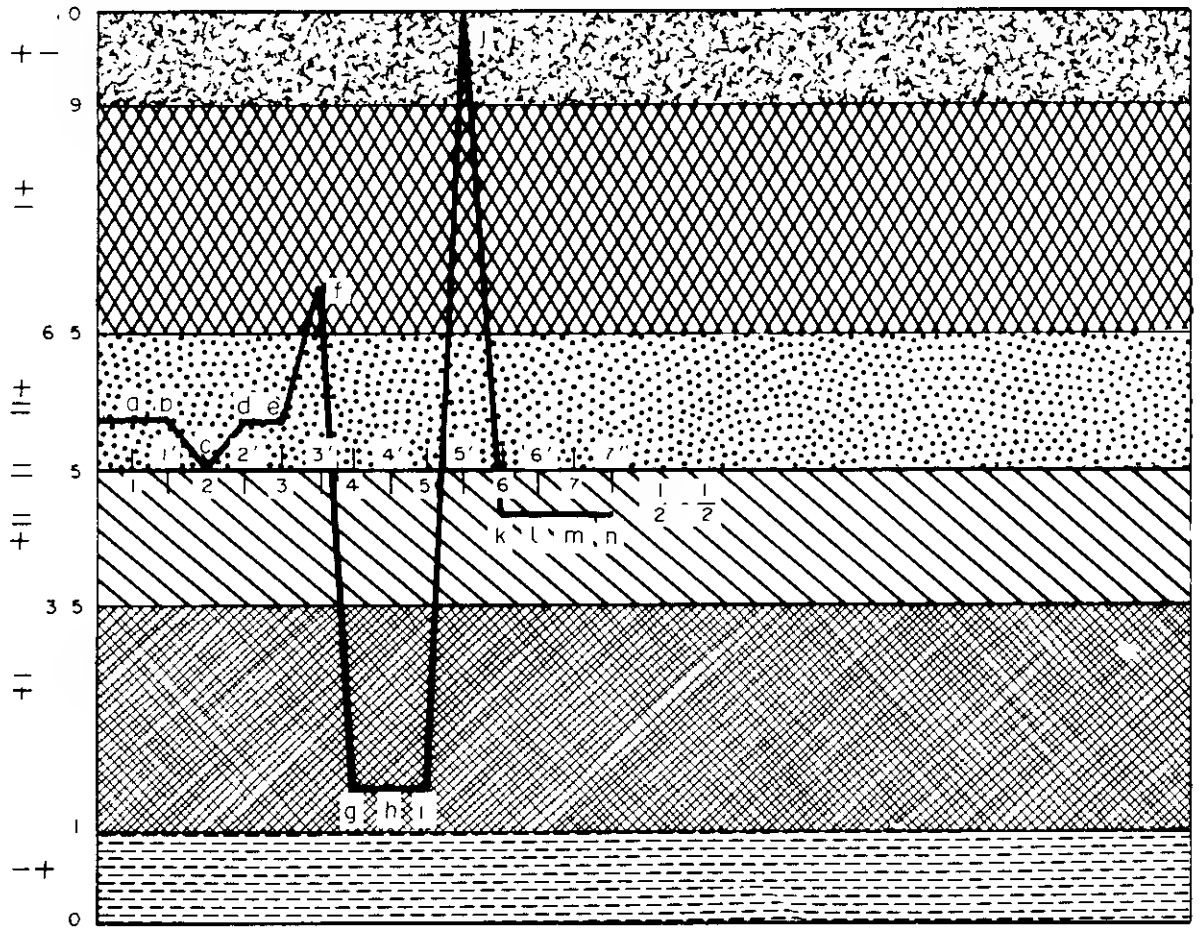
(a) **1 d4** One of the opening moves that preserve White's inherent first move initiative. Assessment value of the position = 5.5.

(b) **1 . . . d5** A solid response which does not affect White's slight advantage. Value = 5.5.

(c) **2 Nc3?!** Dubious, because it hinders c2-c4, White's most promising method of putting pressure on Black's center. Value = 5.0.

(d) **2 . . . c6?!** An inaccurate response which merely justifies White's last move. The correct 2 . . . Nf6 would prevent White's threatened 3 e4. Value = 5.5, based on White's ability to play 3 e4, whether or not he actually does so in the game.

(e) **3 e4** The game has mysteriously transposed into the well known Caro-Kann Defense, a variation which is statistically linked to a slight edge for White. Value = 5.5.



Graph IV

(f) **3 . . . Nf6?** Black's first real mistake. Because 3 . . . Nf6? allows White the opportunity to gain space and time with 4 e5!, the assessment of the position rises sharply in White's favor. This sudden swing is reflected in Graph IV by the ascending line at move 3′. Value = 7.0. Note again that it is the **dynamic** potential for playing 4 e5 which gives White the clear advantage after Black's third move; therefore, White's actual fourth move should have absolutely no effect on the assessment at this very moment.

(g) **4 Qe2??** Very weak! White not only fails to capitalize on his opponent's error, but in addition his 4 Qe2 loses a pawn by force. A simple Calculation reveals the variation 4 Qe2 dxe4 5 Nxe4 Qxd4. An Evaluation of this key position shows that all is level except for the vital element of material. Therefore the assessment value of this, and the stem position after 4 Qe2, is properly rated at 1.5.

(h) **4 . . . dxe4** The correct reply, maintaining the nearly decisive advantage awarded to Black's last move. Value = 1.5.

(i) **5 Nxe4** Ditto.

(j) **5 . . . Nbd7??** A terrible blunder which allows mate in one. Thus the value = 10.0. The obvious 5 . . . Qxd4 leaves Black a solid pawn up and justifies the 1.5 value given him after 4 Qe2.

(k) **6 Nxf6+??** By not finding the decisive 6 Nd6 mate, White answers Black's blunder with one of his own. After 6 Nxf6+ White stands slightly worse (or in graphic terms, Black stands slightly

better) due to his misplaced queen at e2. Value = 4.5.

(l) **6 . . . Nxf6** The correct move, maintaining Black's slightly favorable position. Value = 4.5.

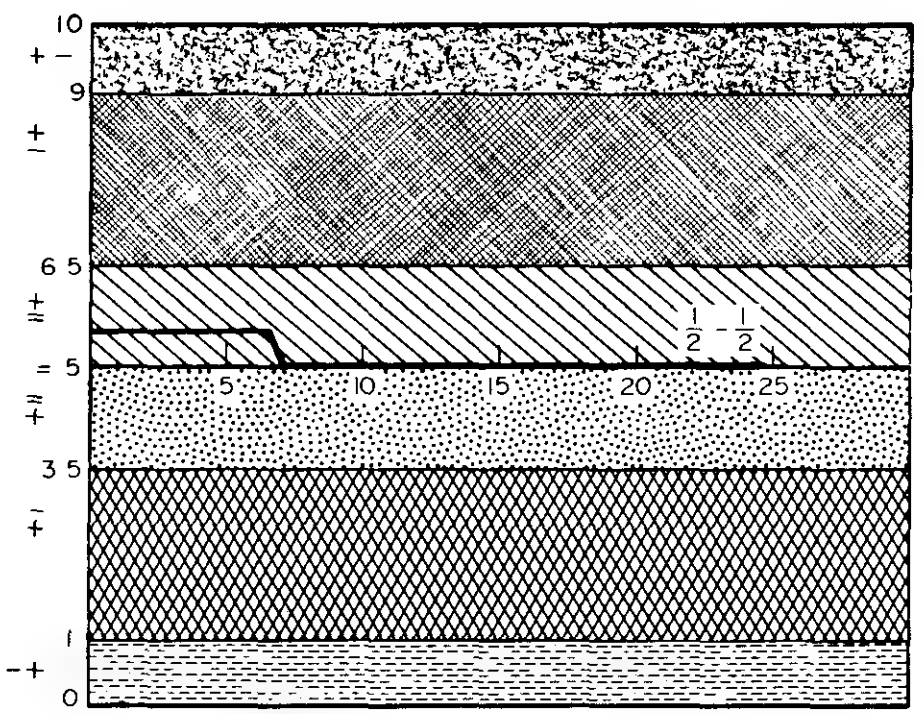
(m) **7 Nf3** Ditto.

(n) **7 . . . Bg4** Again correct; value still = 4.5. The graph shows that at this moment the players agreed a 'grandmaster draw'.

A seismologist examining Graph IV might easily mistake this game for an impending earthquake. To a chess player, the fluctuating lines intruding into five of the six zones suggest a see-saw battle in which both sides committed gross errors.

Usually, a grandmaster game will be marked by a line which steadily rises or falls, with perhaps a few small jumps along the way. Less skilful contestants will tend to produce more violent and irregular graphic patterns. Yet even two very strong players may cause wild fluctuations on the Chess Graph if their game is highly tactical and complex.

A peaceful or error-free encounter will exhibit a more level line, as exemplified by Graph V. Here the absence of jagged lines suggests that both sides played quiet, steady chess throughout the opening and middlegame until their handshake on move 24. Also note the almost total lack of critical points on the graph.



Graph V.

Of the many possible games which could be represented by Graph V, one hypothetical example would be the following:

Symmetrical English Opening

· 1 c4 c5 2 Nc3 Nc6 3 g3 g6 4 Bg2 Bg7 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 O—O O—O 7 d3 (the best chance of gaining some initiative is with *7 d4!*) 7 . . . d6 8 a3

a5 9 Rb1 Ne8 10 Bd2 Rb8 11 Ne1 Nc7 12 Nc2 Bd7 13 b4 axb4 14 axb4 cxb4 15 Nxb4 Nxb4 16 Rxb4 b5 17 cxb5 Nxb5 18 Nxb5 Rxb5 19 Rxb5 Bxb5 20 Qb3 Qd7 21 Rb1 Bc6 22 Bxc6 Qxc6 23 Qb7 Qxb7 24 Rxb7 Re8, draw agreed.

Towards Better Chess

Those of you who are mathematically inclined have probably discovered already that one way of determining the relative and absolute strengths of the players is to measure the length of the line connecting the points on their Chess Graph. A game full of errors, as in Graph IV for example, would exhibit a longer total line and radical aberrations from the norm (equality line). In technical jargon, the graph would be said to have a 'high standard deviation'.

For those of you who never cared much for maths, but love chess and want to improve your game, Chess Graphs have many advantages. First, we are reminded by the Oriental proverb that 'A picture speaks a thousand words', and the same is true of a Chess Graph. It is primarily a pictorial representation of an annotated chess game, and it can improve your powers of association and memory retention by painting a visual image of the flow of the battle.

Second, published games which contain inconsistent evaluations, incongruous notes, or inadequate text can cause frustration. The Chess Graph circumvents these problems by charting an unbroken course of action, where at any specific point in the game the reader may easily find out which player stands better and by how much. And there is no language barrier to worry about!

Third, the Chess Graph is an invaluable instructional tool which stresses self-analysis: 'Who held the advantage at various stages?', 'What were the crucial moments and turning points of the contest?', 'Can technique be improved upon in the opening, middlegame or endgame?', 'What are the foremost areas of weakness and strength?'. Ambitious students may even wish to add an optional chronograph to Chess Graphs of their own games; in this manner they can record and measure the time taken for their moves, relative to the stages and critical moments of the game.

Finally, there are endless applications of Chess Graphs to the latest in computer technology. It is known, for instance, that Chess Graphs of the same game will vary from one annotator to another, depending on strength and style. If these graphs could be readily fed into a computer, it could pave the way for statistical comparisons and surveys of differing annotator opinions. Perhaps even a 'concensus graph' could be constituted out of several dozen or so individual graphs.

In the next chapter we will also be presenting more sophisticated

examples of Chess Graphs, derived from games of world-class grandmasters.

In the meantime, review and practise all that you have learned so far.

3

Examples of Chess Graphs accompanied by Game Notes

Chess Graphs are a useful tool of self-improvement for players of almost *all* standards. They can be used on your own games, as well as on analyses by other players. In this chapter I give four examples from my own games.

Lev Alburt (USA) - Garry Kasparov (USSR)

Lucerne Olympiad 1982

King's Indian Defense

1 c4 g6 2 d4 Bg7 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e4 d6 5 Be2 O—O 6 Bg5

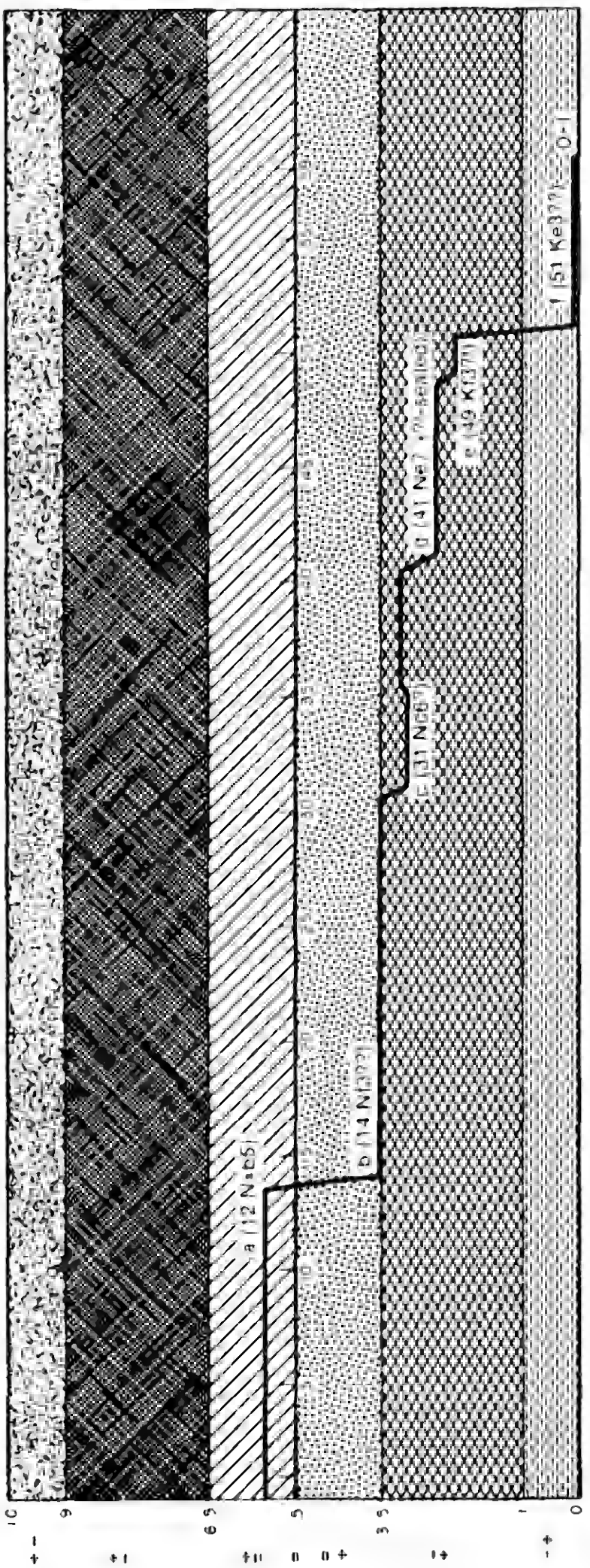
White's last two moves constitute the Averbakh Variation. The immediate tactical point is that the thematic 6 . . . e5 is prevented, because White wins material after 7 dxe5 dxe5 8 Qxd8 Rxd8 9 Nd5.

6 . . . Nbd7

Black prepares 7 . . . e5. The main alternatives here are 6 . . . c5 and 6 . . . h6. A previous Alburt-Kasparov encounter (USSR 1978) featured a typical gambit line: 6 . . . c5 7 d5 h6 8 Bf4 e6!? 9 dxe6 Bxe6 10 Bxd6 Re8 11 Nf3 Nc6 12 O—O Qa5 13 Nd2. White's last move, an innovation at the time, forced the 15-year-old master to think about his response for almost 40 minutes. Yet, he managed to find the correct plan and win very convincingly. The post-mortem analysis convinced me that Kasparov rated among the greatest talents in the Soviet Union.

7 Qc1!

Once again, I put my young foe to the test with a specially prepared innovation, and this time Kasparov ponders over his reply for more than an hour. The normal course is 7 Qd2 e5 8 d5 Nc5! (if *8 . . . a5,* White attacks with *9 h4!*). Here White would just love to play the space-gaining 9 b4, but the rejoinder 9 . . . Ncxe4! 10 Nxe4 Nxe4 11 Bxd8 Nxd2 12 Bxc7 e4! 13 Rc1 e3! hands the initiative over to Black.



Graph VI

After 7 Qc1, however, the line 7 . . . e5 8 d5 Nc5 9 b4 is fully playable for White, as Black has nothing better than to retreat his knight.

7 . . . c5! 8 d5 b5! 9 cxb5 a6

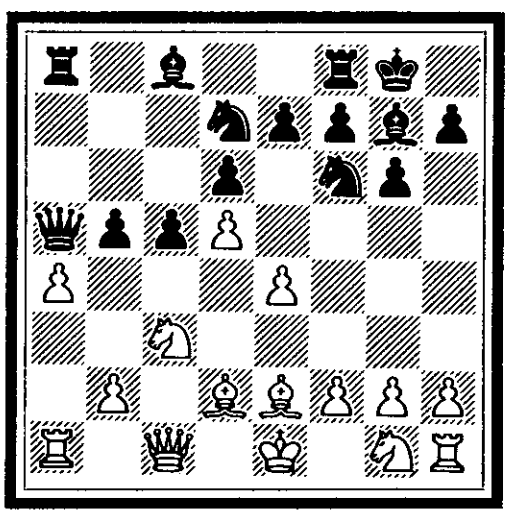
Black has turned the position into a Benko Gambit. At the cost of a pawn he obtains open lines on the Q - side and aggressive play for his pieces. Objectively, though, White still stands slightly better (value = 5.5) because with best play Black does not have full compensation for the pawn.

10 a4!

After 10 bxa6?! Qa5 11 Bd2 Bxa6 12 Nf3 Bxe2 13 Nxe2 Qa6 Black's pressure will prove annoying (value = 4.0).

10 . . . Qa5 11 Bd2 axb5 (*2*)

2



12 Nxb5 *a*

This is the first critical moment of the game: should White play 12 Nxb5 or 12 Bxb5 ? Both moves seem to maintain White's slight edge and each merits the same assessment value of 5.5. So then, how did I discriminate between these two equally valid candidate moves? And what logic can the student apply if faced with a similar dilemma?

This is where the System of Predicted Results comes in useful. I estimated, based on my knowledge and experience, that in ten grandmaster games 12 Nxb5 would yield White approximately 4 wins, 3 losses and 3 draws, while 12 Bxb5 would produce 2 wins, 1 loss and 7 draws. In a 'must draw' situation the more solid 12 Bxb5 would definitely be preferable. But I was feeling very ambitious on this particular occasion (one hour advantage on the clock!), and so I opted for the sharper and riskier choice.

12 . . . Qb6 13 Qc2

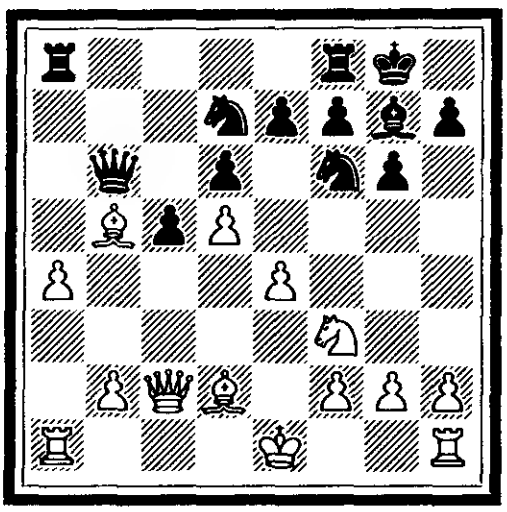
If White protects his e - pawn with 13 f3, then 13 . . . e6! 14 dxe6 fxe6 guarantees Black more than enough for the pawn in the form of his strong center, greater mobility, better development, and attacking chances (value = 4.0).

13 . . . Ba6 14 Nf3?? *b*

A blunder, which leads by force to a very unpleasant position for White. On the graph, the adjusted positional value of 3.5 reflects a ten-game predicted result of 3 White losses and 7 draws. Instead, 14 Rd1 would have preserved the prior 5.5 assessment.

14 . . . Bxb5 15 Bxb5 (*3*)

3



15 . . . Qxb5!

I had foreseen this sacrificial idea back on move 14, but I only considered the variation 14 . . . Nxe4? 15 Qxe4 Bxb5 16 Bxb5 Qxb5 17 axb5 Rxa1+ 18 Ke2 Rxh1 19 Qxe7 (*value* = 7.5). The psychological basis of 14 Nf3?? can now be better understood: after rejecting as unsound the exchange of Black's queen for two rooks, White overlooked the possibility of a queen sacrifice for rook and bishop.

16 axb5 Rxa1+ 17 Bc1 Nxe4 18 O—O Nef6

This is the kind of favorable position that Kasparov envisaged for himself four or five moves ago. White's doubled b - pawns are in serious danger of becoming static weaknesses, and his isolated d - pawn is ripe for plucking with 19 . . . Nb6. In addition, the white pieces lack coordination and scope.

19 b4!

Before his position worsens any more, White makes a strong bid for counterplay. The point is 19 . . . cxb4 20 Qc6!, when suddenly he has wicked threats. So White is able to exchange his weak b - pawn for Black's strong c - pawn.

19 . . . Nxd5 20 Bd2 Rfa8 21 bxc5 Rxf1+! 22 Kxf1 Ra1+ 23 Ke2

Before recapturing on c5, Black cunningly interposes a couple of rook moves which force the enemy monarch out into the open board.

23 . . . Nxc5 24 Qc4! e6 25 b6!

White realizes that his b - pawn is doomed anyway, and so he offers it immediately in order to activate his queen.

25 . . . Nxb6 26 Qb5 Nbd7 27 Be3

The increased influence attained by White's pieces does not affect the overall superiority of the black forces. Here the rook, minor piece and two pawns far outweigh the queen, because Black's dragon-like

pawn chain is well fortified, his passed d - pawn looms as a potential menace, and the black king is safely tucked away while its counterpart sits on a vulnerable square.

Nevertheless, White's situation is by no means hopeless.

27 . . . Bf8 28 Nd4 Ra2+ 29 Kf1 Ra1+ 30 Ke2 e5!

The central formation with pawns on e6 and d5 looks more natural ('Place your pawns on squares of the opposite color to your bishop', we are taught as beginners), but that would allow White possibilities of dark-square penetration on the K-side (bishop on d4).

31 Nc6? *c*

Another turning point has been reached. One of White's main strategic problems is deciding which minor pieces to exchange, if any. In retrospect, since White's most realistic drawing hopes lie in perpetual check, he can maximize his chances by avoiding all exchanges. Therefore 31 Nc6 must be considered wrong, as it leads by force to an unfavorable trade. 31 Nf3 was better.

31 . . . Ra2+ 32 Kf1 Ra1+ 33 Ke2 Ra2+ 34 Kf1

Kasparov's time pressure is the reason for these repetitions.

34 . . . Ra6!

The threat of 35 . . . Rb6 compels White's reply.

35 Bxc5 Nxc5

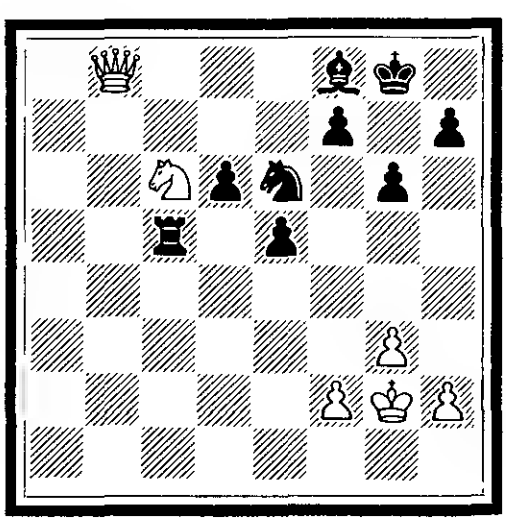
An inaccuracy, which slightly improves White's prospects. As pointed out by Kasparov, the interposition of 35 . . . Ra1+! (as on move 21) would have kept the white king in the center of the board.

36 g3 Ra1+ 37 Kg2

At last the white king has finally found a secure haven.

37 . . . Ne6 38 Qb8 Rd1 39 Qb2 Rd5 40 Qb8 Rc5 *(4)*

4



Here the game was adjourned. The general feeling on both sides of the table was that there was no clear draw for White - but no clear win for Black either.

41 Ne7+?! *d*

Not the most precise sealed move. 41 Nb4 was preferable, in order to bring the important square d5 under immediate control.

41 . . . Kg7 42 Nc8

The 'wandering knight' is the price White must pay for his previous inexactitude. My original intention was to play here 42 Qxd6 (if *42 . . . Rc7?? 43 Qxe5+*), but adjournment analysis revealed that the pin on the white knight is deadly. Black prepares the winning maneuver . . . Rc7 with . . . h5 and . . . Kh7. So, back to unpleasant defending again!

42 . . . Rd5 43 Qa8 Rd2 44 Nb6 Nc5 45 Nc4 Rd4 46 Ne3 Be7 47 h4

A slight weakening, it is true, but Black can always provoke this move by playing . . . h5, if he so desires.

47 . . . h5 48 Nd5 Bd8!

This move came as an unpleasant surprise. During the game I wasn't sure whether I should exchange my knight for the knight or bishop. I was certain, however, that the best drawing chances were offered by avoiding exchanges altogether.

49 Kf3?! *e*

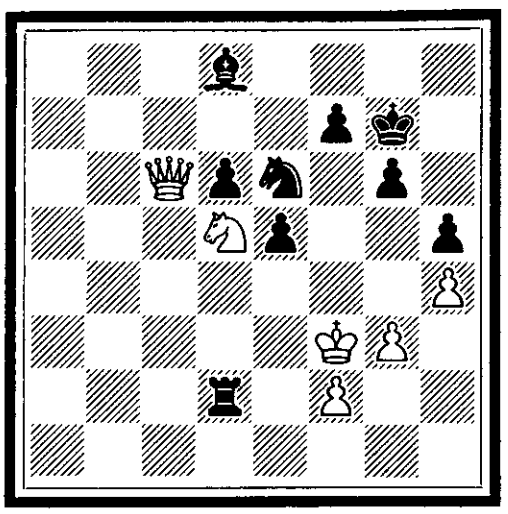
49 Kg1 was more circumspect, although in that case I feared the maneuver . . . Ne4-f6, dislodging the strong knight outpost at d5.

49 . . . Ne6 50 Qc6

Preventing 50 . . . Nc7 and threatening 51 Qxd6.

50 . . . Rd2! (5)

5



Black's threatened knight fork on d4 leaves White with a bewildering array of choices:

(a) I rejected 51 Qxd6 because of 51 . . . Bc7 52 Qd7 Bb6 53 Nxb6 Rxd7 54 Nxd7 f6. According to Fine's *Basic Chess Endings* and Averbakh's *Comprehensive Chess Endings,* this type of position is winning for Black, although quite a few technical problems remain to be solved by the aggressor (value = 1.5).

(b) I went on to examine queen moves, such as 51 Qa8, allowing a trade of knights after 51 . . . Nc7, or 51 Qb7, permitting 51 . . . g5! 52 hxg5 Bxg5 with . . . h4 to follow.

(c) Perhaps the best alternative is 51 Kg2, and after 51 . . . Bxh4! 52 Qxd6 *(52 gxh4?? Rxd5* and wins) 52 . . . Bf6 an endgame with queen + 2 pawns v. rook + knight + 4 pawns will very probably ensue.

Unfortunately, the endgame sources consulted are very sketchy on the subject of queen v. rook + minor piece + 2 pawns. The assessment value of the above positions probably lies somewhere between 2.0 and 2.5 (4 draws and 6 losses or 5 draws and 5 losses).

Instead, I blundered horribly with:

51 Ke3?? *f*

. . . believing that I could simply capture the d - pawn shortly, with a certain draw in hand. But I overlooked:

51 . . . Re2+!

The crusher! The rook cannot be taken because of the knight fork on d4. The game concluded:

52 Kd3 e4+ 53 Kc4 Rc2+ 54 Nc3 Bf6 55 Qxe4 Rxc3+ 56 Kd5 Rc5+ 57 Kxd6 Be5+

White resigns.

After 58 Kd7 Rc7+ 59 Ke8 Bf6 Black threatens 60 . . . Re7 mate.

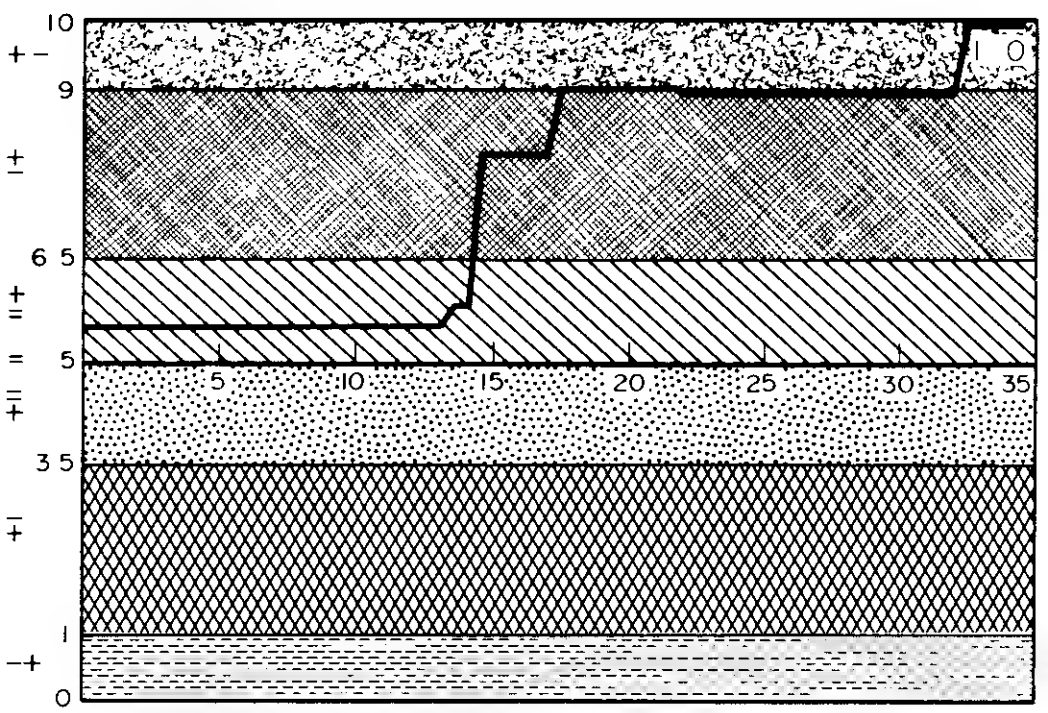
* * *

Opposite-Color Bishops

Lev Alburt - Sergey Kudrin

U.S.A. Championship 1986

Grünfeld Defense



Graph VII

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 d5

In the Grünfeld Defense Black voluntarily cedes White a pawn center, in the hope of later applying pressure on it.

4 cxd5 Nxd5 5 e4 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Bg7 7 Nf3

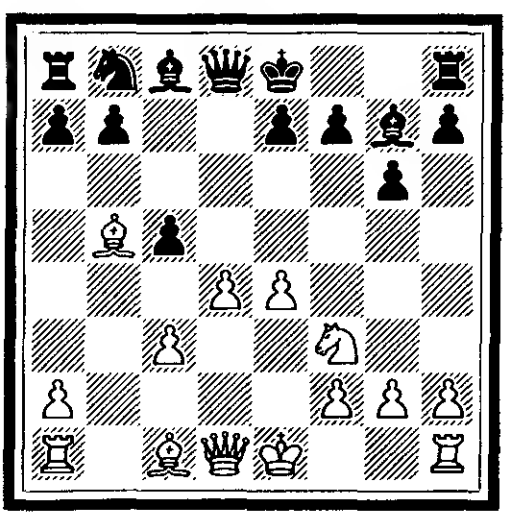
Up to the mid-seventies, in this position White used to play 7 Bc4 and 8 Ne2, in order to counter the pin . . . Bg4 with f2-f3. Then, however, grandmaster Igor Platonov from Kiev (Ukraine) began playing 7 Nf3, and this move (briefly and not very succesfully used half a century ago) soon became the main line for White.

7 . . . c5!

If Black plays 'normally': 7 . . . O—O 8 Be2! b6 9 O—O Bb7 10 Qd3! c5 11 Bg5!, or 8 . . . c5 9 O—O Nc6 10 d5! Bxc3 11 Bh6, White stays clearly better in all variations. Applying my system of numerical evaluation, scaled from 0.0 (White loses) to 10.0 (White wins), I would evaluate the position after 7 . . . O—O as [6.0], which means that if two equally strong grandmasters were to play ten games starting with this position, the statistically expected result would be 6-4 in White's favor. After 7 . . . c5! White has just a normal 'opening' advantage - [5.5].

8 Bb5+(*6*)

6



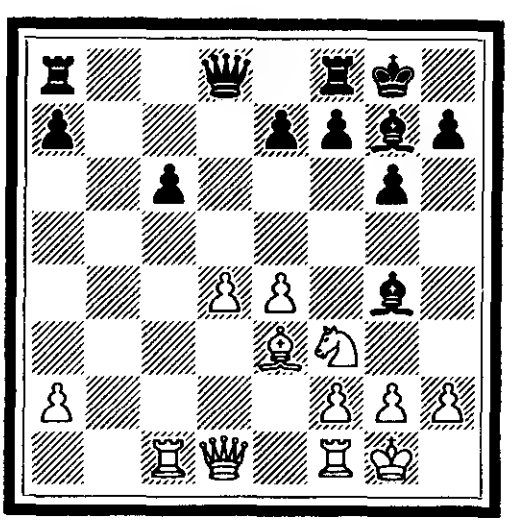
Other popular moves in this position are 8 Be2, 8 Be3, and especially 8 Rb1.

8 . . . Nc6

8 . . . Bd7 9 Rb1 and 8 . . . Nd7 9 a4! (preventing Black's expansion with . . . *a6* and . . . *b6*) both lead to White's advantage - [6.0].

9 O—O cxd4 10 cxd4 O—O 11 Be3 Bg4 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Rc1 (*7*)

7



13 . . . Qa5

13 . . . Qd7 (defending the pawn) deserves serious consideration.

14 Qe2 [5.8]

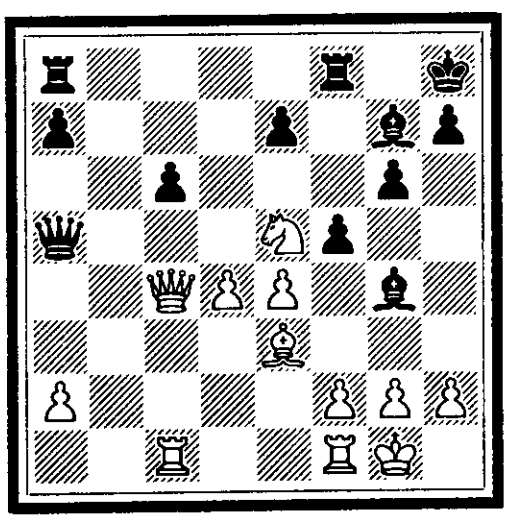
In Alburt-Tukmakov, Decin 1977, White maintained a slight edge [5.5] in the ending after 14 Rxc6 Qxa2 15 Qa1! The game ended in a draw after Black successfully defended his position (later, a pawn down) throughout two adjournment sessions. Against Kudrin, I chose for a while to avoid an endgame.

14 . . . f5?

Black will soon pay for this hyperactive attempt to seize the initiative, and the evaluation curve now jumps up to [8.0], which means a big advantage for White bordering on a technically winning position. 14 . . . Bxf3 or 14 . . . Rfd8 leaves Black with a slighly inferior ([5.8] as mentioned above) but playable game.

15 Qc4+ Kh8 16 Ne5 (*8*)

8



When your opponent makes a move which looks like an obvious blunder - especially if he is a pretty strong player - it is advisable to try to find out what he has overlooked. During the game I thought (and I was basically correct) that Kudrin had underestimated this 16th move and overlooked my 18th move, while considering primarily the unclear situation after 16 Ng5? f4! [5.0].

16 . . . Bxe5 [8.0]

The opposite-color bishops will favor White. 16 . . . f4 would have led to complications where, however, White's chances are again very much better because of his extra pawn: [8.0].

17 dxe5 f4? [9.0] **18 Bc5!**

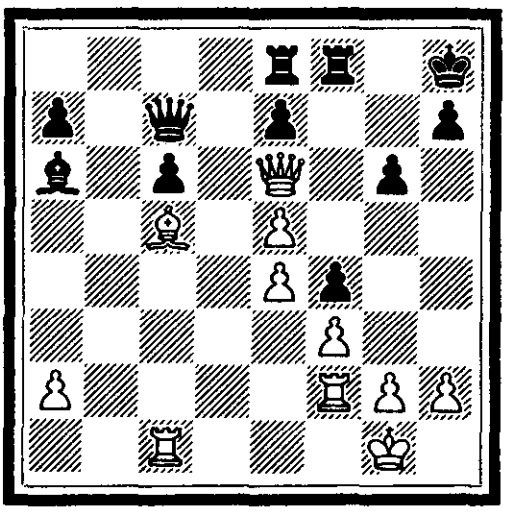
And White now has a decisive advantage. Black would have had better chances for a successful resistance after 17 . . . fxe4, eliminating one of White's powerful center pawns.

18 . . . Rae8

Possibly Black overlooked earlier that 18 . . . f3 loses the exchange, with no compensation for it, after 19 Bxe7 fxg2 20 Rfe1.

19 f3 Bc8 20 Rf2 Ba6 21 Qe6 Qc7 (*9*)

9



22 Ba3? [8.9]

This prolongs the struggle, which could have been over after the more accurate 22 Bb4 Bb5 23 Rd2, aiming at d7. Fortunately for White, this is the kind of position where slight inaccuracies do not allow the 'victim' to escape.

22 . . . Bb5 23 Bc5

White wanted to avoid the complications which were possible after 23 Rd2 Qa5, but overlooked that, following 24 Bxe7 Qxd2 25 Bf6+ Rxf6 26 Qxe8+ Kg7 27 exf6+ Kh6, he would have an easy win by 28 Qf8+ Kh5 29 Qc5+.

23 . . . Ba6 24 Ba3

Repeating the position and still overlooking 24 Bb4.

24 . . . Bb5 25 h3

Avoiding the three-fold repetition and simultaneously improving the position of the white king.

25 . . . Kg7

Black also decides to do something about his king.

26 Kh2 Rf7 27 Qb3

Black has somehow improved his position, and so now I have to regroup my forces.

27 . . . e6

This prevents e5 - e6, but here the cure (which creates a weakness at d6) is no better than the disease.

28 Rd2 Qc8

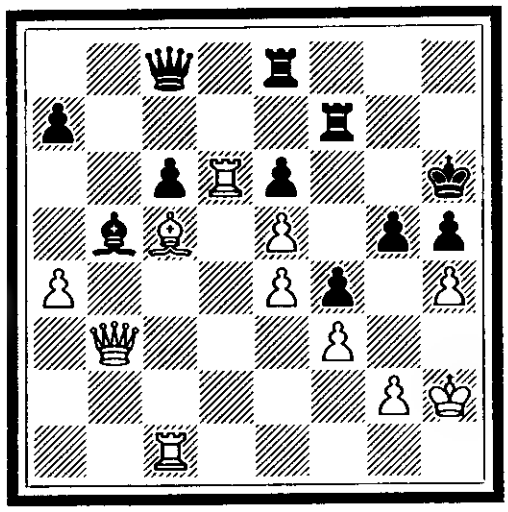
Naturally, Black cannot take on e5 because of Bb2, winning his queen.

On 28 . . . Rd7, offering the exchange of rooks, White could choose between 29 Bd6 and 29 Rd6.

29 Bc5 h5 30 h4! Kh6 31 Rd6 g5 32 a4 (*10*)

Black could not effectively parry this threat.

10



32 . . . gxh4?! [9.9]

A panic response, but 32 . . . Ba6 33 hxg5+ Kxg5 34 Rxc6 also leads to an easy win for White *(34 . . . Qxc6 35 Be7+).*

33 axb5 Rg7 34 Bf2, and Black resigned.

And now two further games with Chess Graphs, which at the same time cover the most important 'modern' variation of the Alekhine Defense.

* * *

Defending the 'Alekhine'

For almost twenty years I have been countering 1 e4 with 1 . . . Nf6, the so-called Alekhine Defense. Among grandmasters, I am the only one who does it almost exclusively, 99 times out of 100.

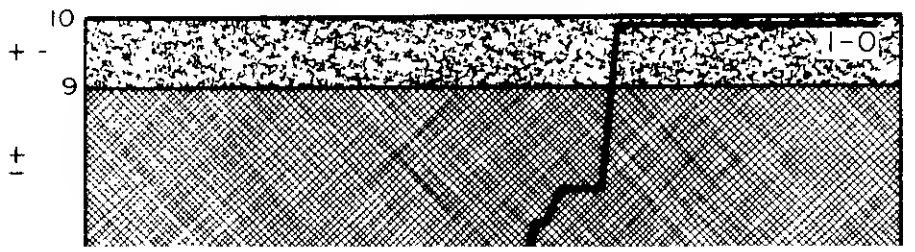
Such a 'narrow ' approach to the opening has many advantages, but also some disadvantages. In favor of my method I should say that, by playing the same opening all the time, I can learn it very well. I know what to avoid, and what to seek. I am not afraid even of defending some clearly inferior positions, as long as I know how to handle them. In other words, experience pays.

Now let's look at the other side of the coin. The most dangerous thing that can happen to me in the Alekhine is, so to speak, to step on a mine - to be blown away by some unexpected innovation which my opponent has prepared hours or even months before our encounter. However, this tactic often backfires. I may, by sheer accident, choose a different line, or I may have discovered this 'mine' beforehand and come up with a surprise of my own. Or I may be able to refute the innovation over the board. Sometimes it is enough for me just to maintain equality, or even to find a way to achieve a defensible, albeit inferior, position; then my vast experience with Alekhine-type positions should help me to minimize the danger by drawing the game, or perhaps - if my opponent presses too hard - to win it.

Happy endings of this type have often occurred in my games. Unfortunately, you cannot **always** count on happy endings in chess, unless you are as good a player as Bobby Fischer. The following game shows an example of how a surprise works - and why.

Ljubo Ljubojevic - Lev Alburt

New York Open 1985



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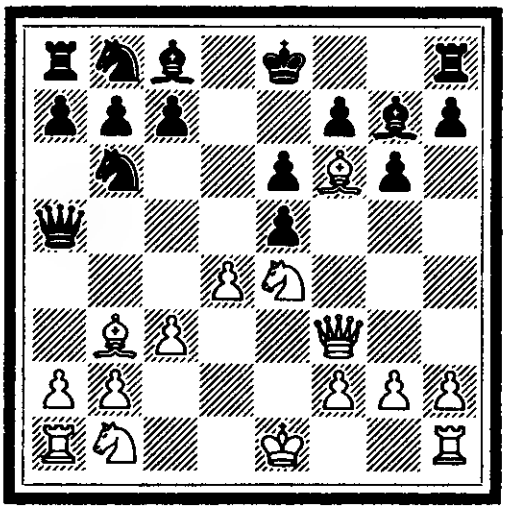


While Black is walking a tightrope of 'only' moves, White enjoys the privilege (or perhaps it is a burden?) of having choices. In the USA-UK Champions' Match of 1985, Nigel Short played against me 12 Nf6+ Kf8 13 d5, but after 13 . . . e4 14 Qg3 Na6 (a calm move suggested by Short after the game) the position remains unclear, sharp - and balanced [5.0].

12 . . . Bxf6 13 Qxf6 O—O 14 Qxe5

Other continuations do not promise White any real compensation for the pawn, e.g. 14 Qg5 [4.0] 14 . . . Kg7, or, more aggressive, 14 . . . f5!?

14 . . . Nc6?! [5.8]

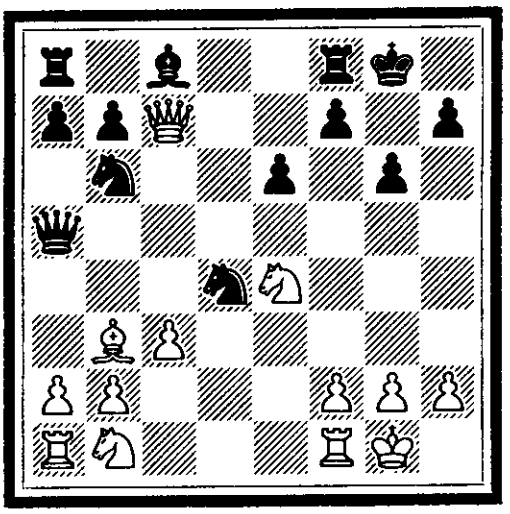
Black's best move here is 14 . . . Qxe5. The ending after 15 dxe5 Nc6, or even 15 . . . Bd7 (a move and a plan - developing the bishop first - found by my then 12-year-old student, K. K. Karanja, an Expert from New York City) is at least equal, probably even slightly better for Black [4.8]. If this evaluation is correct, then the entire 'pacifist' plan starting with 12 Bf6 must be judged inadequate, at least from a strictly opening theory point of view, and this may cast doubts on the entire system, starting with 8 Qf3 or even earlier. At any rate, I now habitually reject draw offers made in this ending by players of

equal strength or even higher rated than me. So, at this moment in the game I had a choice - and I made the wrong one. After 14 . . . Nc6 I considered only 15 Qxa5 Nxa5 with a good game for Black (at least, an easy equality), overlooking that White could play

15 Qxc7 Nxd4 16 O—O!! [6.0] (*12*)

I had only analyzed 16 Nbd2? [4.5]. Ljubojevic's move, which sacrifices a rook, came as a surprise to me. After long thought I decided to accept the gift, ambitiously rejecting the more prudent

12

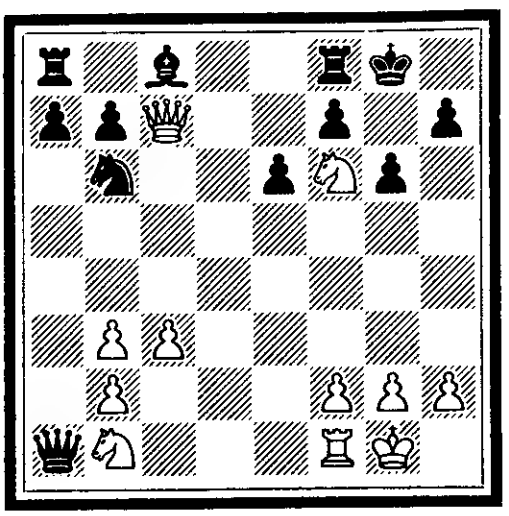


16 . . . Nxb3 17 axb3 Qxa1 [7.5]

Practically the best try, because after 17 . . . Qf5 18 Nbd2 White is clearly better [7.0]. *

18 Nf6+ (*13*)

13



The evaluation [7.5] means that in ten games played from this position by two strong (**equally** strong) grandmasters, White should score 7½ points and Black, accordingly, 2½. In a sharp position such as the one here, the likely distribution of results is seven wins for White, one draw, and two wins for Black.

In reality, if only I had made the one correct move here, 18 . . . Kh8, the odds would have been more favorable for me, because most natural plans, and most natural moves, including all those suggested by Ljubojevic after the game, as well as by numerous annotators, do not guarantee White an easy life! For instance, 19 Nd2 Qa5, or 19 Qf4 Nd5 20 Qh6 Nxf6 21 Qxf8+ Ng8 22 Nd2 Qa6 23 Ne4 b6, threatening **both** 24 . . . Qxf1+ followed by 25 . . . Ba6+, and 24 . . . Bb7.

The strongest move for White here is 19 Qe5, which Black must counter with 19 . . . Bd7, when after 20 Nxd7+ f6 21 Nxf6 Rf7 an unclear position arises, where White's best chance is to play g2-

* Here and on other occasions the author makes the point that the best continuation in an actual game (when a position is encountered for the first time) may differ from that established by later analysis (Editor's note).

g4-g5. Another promising (indeed, the most promising) idea for White is to ignore the black bishop (after *19 . . . Bd7)* and to continue 20 Nd2 and 21 Nde4, aiming for an attack. I am not eager to repeat this line for Back, but still it was - at the time - my best chance, and a reasonably good one. Whereas the move I made led to a completely lost game, with no serious problems for my opponent to face.

18 . . . Kg7? [9.9] **19 Qe5 Rd8 20 Nd2 Qxb2 21 Nde4 Qe2 22 Nd7+**

White has a completely winning position, with several convincing continuations from which to choose. Here, for instance, 22 Ne8++ Kf8 23 Qc5+ Kg8 *(23 . . . Kxe8 24 Nf6 mate)* 24 N4f6+ Kh8 25 Qf8 mate was possible. But the text continuation is fully adequate to score the point.

22 . . . Kh6 23 Qg5+ Kg7 24 Qf6+ Kh6 25 Ne5 Rf8 26 f3 Qe3+ 27 Kh1 Nd7 28 Ng4+ Kh5 29 Ng3 mate.

This exciting game illustrates an important point: it is usually not enough to surprise your opponent with an opening innovation, even one which is rock-solid. You must continue to play well afterwards (as Ljubojevic did) and, in order to win, you may still need a degree of 'cooperation' from your opponent - which I provided, involuntarily, and at a cost to myself of several thousand dollars.

A Theoretical Innovation: How to Surprise your Opponent

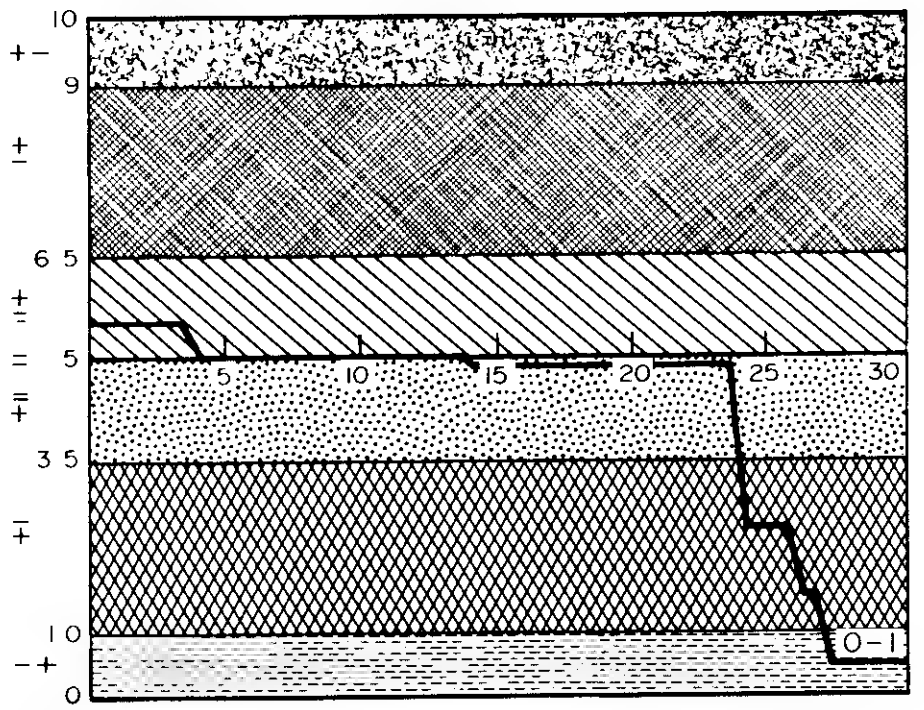
If you play the same opening system over and over again, you should expect that some of your opponents may be well prepared for you. For this reason, grandmasters spend a lot of time re-examining their favorite systems in order to detect, and then to eliminate, 'holes' in their opening repertoire. Another good idea is to vary if not the opening, then at least the systems within your favorite opening, and from time to time to surprise your opponents by deviating from your usual main lines. Typically, such work is done, and innovations are found, at home in the comfort of your study. More rarely, a new idea strikes you in a well-researched position not before, but during the game . . .

Viktor Pupols - Lev Alburt

U.S.A. Open, Portland 1987

The following game was played in round 10 (out of 12). With 7½ points out of 9 (6 wins and 3 draws) I was tied for second place with several other players, half a point behind the leader. Therefore I had to play for a win even with the black pieces. My opponent was a strong correspondence player and a noted theoretician. Not surprisingly, at the board he spent a lot of time - at least a full hour -

even before a well known opening position, a so-called 'tabia', was reached after White's 17th move.



Graph IX

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 g6 5 Bc4 Nb6 6 Bb3 Bg7 7 Ng5 e6 8 f4

White tries to 'lock in' Black's dark-square bishop.

8 . . . dxe5 9 fxe5

Black stands better in the ending after 9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 Nc6 [4.5]. In fact, endings occuring in the Alekhine Defense usually favor Black, because White's over-extended pawn structure, which may be a plus and a foundation for a successful attack in the middle-game, is likely to become a liability once the queens are off the board.

9 . . . c5 10 O—O

10 c3 cxd4 11 O—O, which transposes to the same position, is the more common move order here.

10 . . . O—O

After some thought (about 5 minutes) I decided not to deviate from the main line mentioned above. After all, 10 . . . c4?! 11 Nxf7 followed by 12 Nd6+ is too risky, while 10 . . . Qxd4+ 11 Qxd4 cxd4 is possible, but not very promising as regards playing for a win.

11 c3 cxd4 12 cxd4 Nc6 13 Nf3

Black stands slightly better after 13 Be3 Nd5 14 Bxd5 *(14 Bc1 Ne7* and *15 . . . Nf5)* 14 . . . exd5 [4.5]

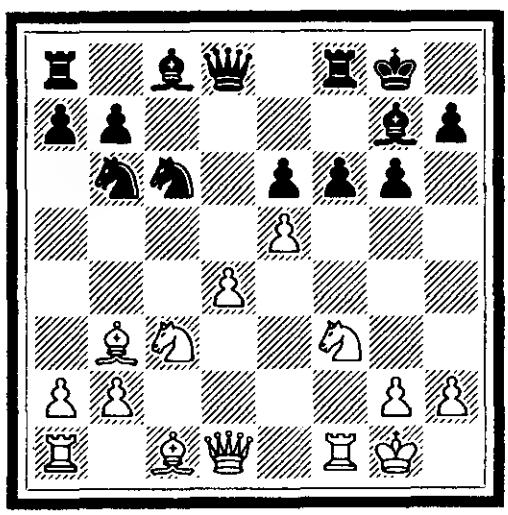
13 . . . f6 [5.0].

This is the only move to offer Black an equal game. Its purpose is to activate the dark-square bishop, and for this it is worth weakening the e6 pawn. So far, the game has developed normally. White usually enjoys a small edge in the opening (let's say, after *1 e4),* which

statistics determine as [5.5], or a score of 5½-4½ in White's favor out of 10 games played between grandmasters. Some grandmasters consider the Alekhine Defense to be only semi-correct; in other words, Black is not supposed to achieve equality here. I hold a quite different opinion, and I would evaluate the entire so-called Modern System, starting with 4 Nf3, as leading to equality: [5.0].

14 Nc3 *(14)*

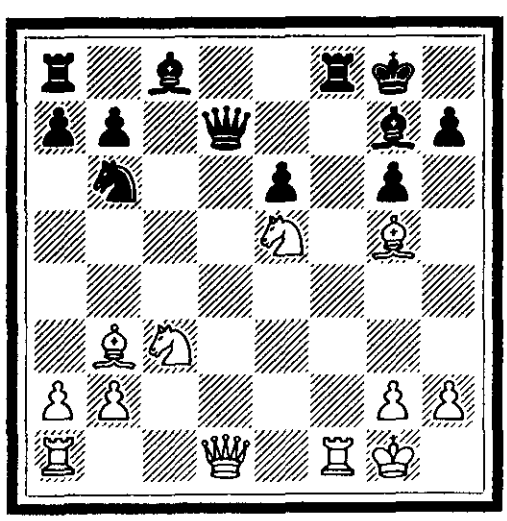
14



The usual continuation here is 14 exf6 Qxf6 15 Be3 Nd5 16 Bf2 Nf4 with a complex, sharp position and chances for both sides. The pawn sacrifice offered by my opponent wasn't a surprise for me. Back in 1981, Lubos Kavalek had mentioned this idea to me, and later I analyzed it extensively.

14 . . . fxe5 15 Bg5 Qd7 16 dxe5 Nxe5 17 Nxe5 *(15)*

15



Up to this point my opponent had spent more than an hour on his clock. I had used less than fifteen minutes, most of it considering some deviation from the main line which I thought might force White to think even longer and to get into time pressure. I considered, for instance, 15 . . . Qc7, provoking 16 Nb5, but then rejected it for positional reasons - the white knight comes to d6 or c7, with **at least** full compensation for the pawn for White [5.5].Then a new idea came to mind - the one I actually played. (The usual continuation is *17*

. . . Bxe5 or *17 . . . Qxd1 18 Raxd1 Bxe5,* with an equal game; White has full compensation for the pawn, but no more). I double-checked my innovation several times, as such ideas discovered at the board are often not in fact sound. After all, I had spent many hours on this position at home, with no external pressure, and had not found - or rather I had seen but rejected - the plan which occurred to me during the game. Isn't this a good reason for suspecting that the innovation is somehow flawed? Basically this is the correct way of thinking, with appropriate scepticism. Still, there are rules (trust your home analysis) and there are exceptions, as sometimes external pressure (the excitement of the struggle) can unleash your creativity. After I had proved to myself that my intended innovation was at least as good as my old preparations, I played:

17 . . . Rxf1+! 18 Qxf1

As I expected, Viktor spent more than forty minutes here. He rejected 18 Kxf1, because after 18 . . . Bxe5 Black wins a tempo by attacking the h2 pawn.

18 . . . Qd4+! 19 Kh1 Qxe5

During the game, as I recall, I was very pleased with my position, and evaluated it as [3.5] or at least [4.0] - only partial compensation for White for the sacrificed pawn. I saw that the natural 20 Bf4 Qf5 would be very good for Black, who would continue with 21 . . . Bd7 and 22 . . . Rf8. It was almost too good to be true and, thinking for White, I realized that he should deny me control of the f - file. After a few minutes, Pupols made the move I considered the strongest:

20 Be7

I replied with the natural

20 . . . Bd7

By this point I was already more sceptical, or rather, more objective about my position. I realized that White had almost full, perhaps even full compensation for the pawn. (This is also my current evaluation of this position: [4.9]. Therefore, White's pawn sacrifice 14 Nc3 isn't really bad, and the evaluation after 14 Nc3 should be [4.8-4.9], just slightly below total equality, making this line a reasonable way of playing for a draw.) 20 . . . Qc7 deserves consideration, but I chose a more natural move - in fact I did so because I overlooked something . . .

21 Re1 Qf5 22 Qe2

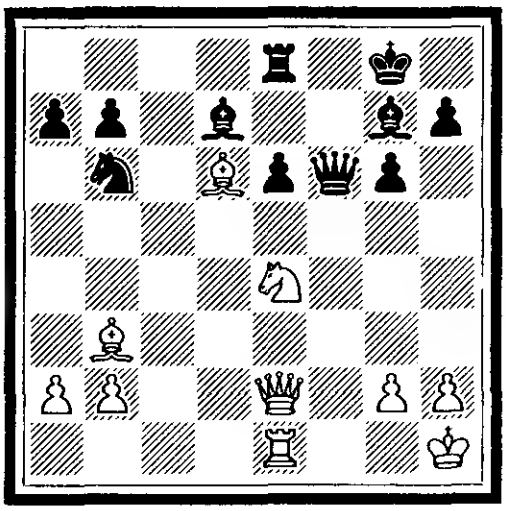
Of course, White can't win the pawn back here, as 22 Qxf5 gxf5 23 Bxe6+ Bxe6 24 Rxe6 Re8 loses a piece.

22 . . . Re8 23 Bd6

Only here did I realize that after 24 Rf1 my queen would be denied the e5 square. The game is now virtually equal.

23 . . . Qf6 24 Ne4? [2.5] *(16)*

16



This looks dangerous, but in reality it isn't. White gives up a second pawn in order to bring his knight into the action. However, his attack is not strong enough, whereas Black gains not only another pawn, but also extra maneuverability for his queen and an opportunity to exploit the weaknesses in **White's** defences. And while there were no grounds for a decisive attack for White, there were equally no grounds for panic. After 24 Rf1 Qd4 25 Rd1 Black must either agree to a draw by repetition, or play for complications, as I intended, with 25 . . . Qh4. Still, as already mentioned, here White has almost full, or completely full compensation for the pawn sacrificed.

24 . . . Qxb2 25 Qf3 Bc6 26 Rf1? [1.5]

This attack leads nowhere. 26 h4 deserves consideration, but it still can't change the reality: that Black, with two extra pawns, has excellent chances of winning the game.

26 . . . Kh8! 27 Qg4? [1.0]

This loses further material; however, the game was already almost completely lost.

27 . . . Qd4

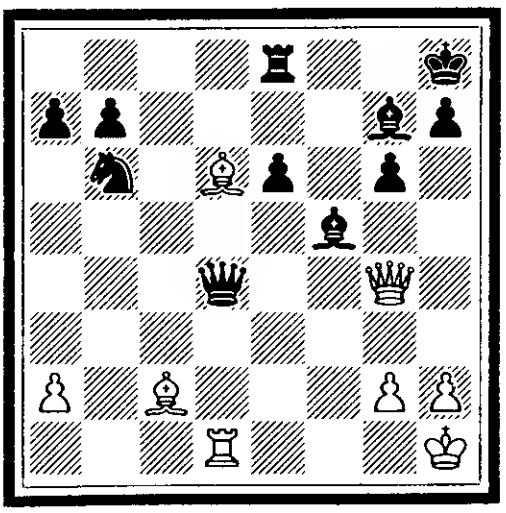
Prior to making this move, I spent at least 15 minutes analyzing its consequences. It looks as though Black wins a piece, but White can (and did) continue

28 Bc2 Bxe4 29 Rd1

As already mentioned, I foresaw - and analyzed - this position before making my 27th move. I knew that I was winning, and that the win should not be too difficut to find. In such a situation one should be especially cautious not to drop a virtually sure point, and not even give the opponent extra chances of prolonging the struggle. So many games have been drawn, or even lost, starting with inaccuracies in completely won positions! After 29 Rd1, for instance, Black can win a third pawn: 29 . . . Bxg2+. This I saw instantly. But White's two bishops and the weak pawns on e6 and b7 make Black's task (to win the game) not so easy. And after all, I had plenty of time on the clock, so why not look for an instant kill? I found it (on the 27th move), and now I went for it.

29 . . . Bf5 *(17)*

17



And White resigned, as after 30 Rxd4 Bxg4 31 Rxg4 Rc8 he loses a piece in all variations.

In this game an innovation *(17 . . . Rxf1+)* did not win instantly (this happens very rarely). Instead, Black gained a very slight edge in a completely unknown (to both sides) and very complicated position. White played very well for a while, maintaining almost adequate compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but he had to spend a lot of time solving all these problems. Facing imminent time pressure, he made his first serious error with 24 Ne4, which gave Black a second pawn and excellent winning chances. Two further errors soon followed, allowing Black to win this game with a little finesse *(29 . . . Bf5)*. Once again, to find an innovation, even a good innovation, and to use it is not usually enough to win the game - further strong play and a degree of cooperation from your opponent are also required.

4

Specialization (Part I)

Strengthen your Entire Game by Mastering One Position at a Time

Top players have a training secret from which amateurs could also greatly benefit - if only they knew what it was! The trouble is that most of the basic chess manuals disregard it completely, while the ones that do suggest it (like Kotov's highly acclaimed *Think Like a Grandmaster)* overlook many of its virtues.

Simply stated, it is as follows: to broaden your overall chess skills, choose one concrete position and analyze it exhaustively. Only after you have painstakingly unearthed every latent strategic idea and tactical nuance should you proceed to a different position.

The immortal Aron Nimzowitsch was a staunch advocate of this didactic approach, and I too wholeheartedly recommend it. I advise my students to devote their hours of independent study to thorough research on a solitary position, be it a commonly played set-up, instructive middlegame formation, critical moment from a tournament game, complicated adjournment, or composed endgame study.

Initially, this system of specialized learning may appear time-consuming and even monotonous. But if you stick with it, your diligence will return generous rewards, since you will:

- Achieve total mastery over a new and important position.
- Attain absolute confidence in your ability to play that position against anyone - from either side of the board.
- Increase your comprehension and enjoyment of published games featuring that position.
- Learn the various opening lines and move orders which will transpose the game into your position.
- Broaden your opening repetoire and theoretical knowledge, while improving your study habits and research techniques.

- Become better acquainted with positions of similar pawn structure or theme.
- Absorb motifs and finesses which you can also apply to other positions.
- Dramatically improve pattern recognition and combinative skill.
- Improve both long and short range planning.
- Analyze more deeply, accurately, and efficiently.
- Train yourself to think objectively, and reduce dependence on dogmatic principles and stereotyped opinions.
- Heighten your awareness and respect for the myriad possibilities and hidden resources in a given position.
- Expand your sense of creativity and capacity for discovering original ideas.
- Discover that your analytical potential is not as limited as you perhaps thought.
- Increase your concentration and attention span.
- Sharpen board visualization, and develop a facility for piece coordination and spacial relationships.
- Develop patience and perseverance, and control impulsive tendencies.
- Discover the importance of adequate home preparation.
- Stimulate your appetite for studying and playing chess.
- Improve your results in adjourned positions.
- Raise your rating and overall playing strength to a much higher level.

Isolated Knowledge

For your introduction to the system of specialization, we invite you to analyze the test position at the end of this chapter, and then compare your conclusions with mine in the following chapter. Take as much time to analyze as you want or need (several sessions lasting one or two hours each is recommended), and analyze at your own pace.

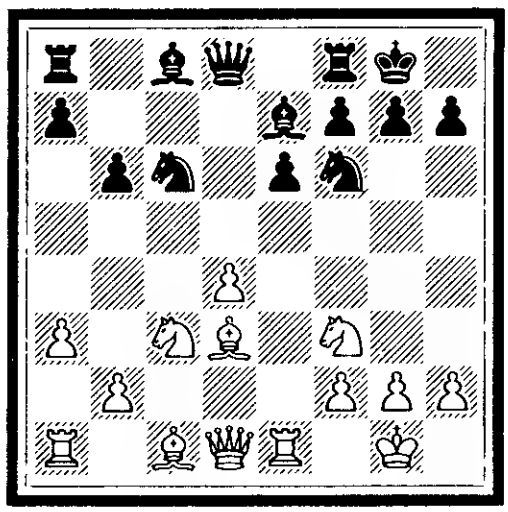
Note that my selection of this particular position was not made arbitrarily; I had a number of good reasons in mind, including:

- Relevance to modern opening theory.
- Easy access from numerous openings and move orders.
- Originality and lack of previously published analysis.
- Non-conformity to general strategic principles.
- Few and relatively uncomplicated variations and subvariations.
- Abundance of tactics and combinations.
- Instructional value.

Before we tackle this new and interesting challenge, a strategic

overview and general theoretical discussion seem in order. First, let's examine the stem position prior to White's last move. *(18).*

18



An unassuming middlegame set-up; yet the quantity and variety of opening lines which can lead into it is amazing. Can you think of any that could have been added to this list?

Queen's Gambit Declined, Semi-Tarrasch Variation

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 (this position can also be reached via the Reti move order *1 Nf3 d5 2 c4 e6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3)* 4 . . . c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 e3 Nc6 7 Bd3 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 O—O O—O 10 Re1 Nf6 11 a3 b6, arriving at the above position.

English Opening, Symmetrical Variation

1 c4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 e3 e6 5 d4 d5 (transpositions from Benoni systems include *1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 e3 e6 4 Nf3 d5 5 Nc3 Nc6* and *1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 e3 d5 5 Nc3 Nc6)* 6 cxd5 Nxd5 7 Bd3 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 O—O O—O 10 Re1 Nf6 11 a3 b6.

Caro-Kann Defense, Panov Attack

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 (also from the Center Counter Game: *1 e4 d5 2 exd5 Nf6 3 c4 c6 4 d4! cxd5)* 5 Nc3 (and again from the English: *1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 c6 3 e4 d5 4 exd5 cxd5 5 d4)* 5 . . . e6 6 Nf3 Be7 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Bd3 O—O 9 O—O Nc6 10 Re1 Nf6 11 a3 b6.

Caro-Kann Defense, Modern Exchange Variation

1 e4 c6 2 c4 d5 3 cxd5 cxd5 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 Nc3 Qd8 6 d4 Nf6 (Sicilian players may reach this position by a Morra Gambit Declined: *1 e4 c5 2 d4 cxd4 3 c3 d5!? 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 cxd4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Qd8)* 7 Nf3 e6 8 Bd3 Nc6 9 O—O Be7 10 Re1 O—O 11 a3 b6.

Sicilian Defence, Alapin Variation

1 e4 c5 2 c3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 d4 e6 *(or 1 e4 c5 2 c3 e6 3 d4 d5 4 exd5 Qxd5,* transposing) 5 Nf3 Nf6 6 Bd3 Be7 7 O—O cxd4 8 cxd4 Nc6 9 Nc3 Qd8 10 Re1 O—O 11 a3 b6.

Alekhine Defense, Two Pawns Attack

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 c4 Nb6 4 c5 Nd5 5 Nc3 e6 6 d4 d6 7 cxd6 cxd6 8 Nf3 Nc6 (this position can also arise from two Sicilian move orders: Alapin Variation - *1 e4 c5 2 c3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 d4 cxd4 5 cxd4 d6 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Nc3 e6,* or the Nimzowitsch-Rubinstein Variation - *1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 c3 e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 cxd4 d6 7 Nc3 Nc6)* 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 Bd3 Be7!? 11 O—O O—O 12 Re1 Nf6 13 a3 b6.

Of all these openings, the most common transposition into the above diagram is from the Semi-Tarrasch. Consequently, most of the all-purpose opening manuals (such as the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings)* analyze it under that heading. To give you a better understanding of this important position, let's take a more detailed look at the opening:

1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5

5 . . . exd5 would produce a 'full' Tarrasch. After the continuation 6 e3 Nc6 7 Be2 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bd6 9 O—O O—O the play is similar to our main line, except that colors are reversed and White is a full tempo ahead.

6 e3

A completely different middlegame results from 6 e4 Nxc3 7 bxc3 cxd4 8 cxd4, when White's central phalanx is offset by Black's Q - side majority. With the more circumspect 6 e3, White consolidates his center and postpones his offensive exploits until after his K - side forces have been fully mobilized.

6 . . . Nc6 7 Bd3 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 O—O O—O 10 Re1!

Discouraging the thematic 10 . . . b6 due to 11 Nxd5 exd5 *(or 11 . . . Qxd5 12 Be4 Qd6 13 Qc2)* 12 Bxh7+ Kxh7 13 Qc2+ Kg8 14 Qxc6.

10 . . .Nf6

With this retreat, Black transfers an important defender to the K - side, prepares the fianchetto of his queen's bishop, and unleashes a direct assault on the d - pawn. The main alternatives to the text are 10 . . . Bf6 11 Be4 Nce7, and 10 . . . Ncb4 11 Bb1 Nf6.

11 a3

A useful prophylactic against the perennial threat of . . . Nb4. The d - pawn is indirectly protected, e.g. 11 . . . Nxd4?? 12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Bxh7+.

11 . . . b6

Black, of course, prepares to mobilize his last undeveloped minor piece; the middlegame battle is beginning to take shape.

Let's take stock. Material is exactly equal, but the pawn structure is quite unbalanced. White has emerged from the opening with the characteristic 'isolani', a paradoxical blend of static weakness and dynamic strength.

Isolani (ICE-oh-LAH-ny) is a term which was used by Nimzowitsch to describe the isolated d - pawn, and despite his misnomer (the Latin singular 'isolanus' seems more appropriate), the nickname stuck. By definition, the player with the isolani has traded away his e - pawn and c - pawn. His opponent has exchanged his d - pawn for one of these, and either his e - pawn or (as in this particular case) his c - pawn for the other.

The dual Clark Kent/Superman role of the isolani stems from a host of contrasting elements. From one point of view, the isolated d - pawn is a vulnerable, stationary target, while the squares surrounding it, especially d5, are prone to enemy occupation. On the other hand, White has excellent positional compensation: greater piece mobility, spacial superiority, increased central influence, and advanced knight outposts on the squares e5 and c5. In general we can state that, given the pawn structure of the above diagram, the two sides should plan their strategy according to the following guidelines:

White

- Either occupy e5 with a knight and aim for a K - side assault . . .
- or operate on the c - file, using c5 as a strong-point.
- Exploit all available open lines and diagonals.
- Guard against crippling blockades.
- Prize open the position (especially when ahead in development) with a well-timed d4-d5 . . .
- or at least make sure that Black's pieces are tied to preventing it.
- Strive to keep pieces on the board, particular his own knights.
- Avoid especially those piece trades which simplify into a lifeless ending or force the passive defense of the d - pawn.

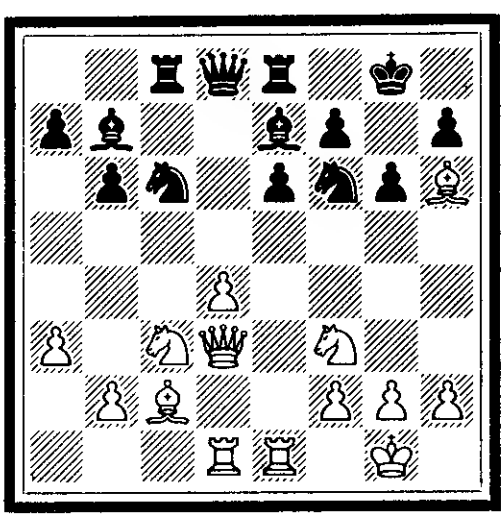
Black

- Control and/or occupy the important d5 outpost.
- Prevent the advance and liquidation of the weak d - pawn (Nimzowitsch's formula: Restrain, Blockade, Destroy!).
- Tie down White's pieces to the defense of the isolani.
- Trade pieces to reduce White's attacking force.
- Strive for simplification and a favorable transition into the endgame.

Continuing with our analysis . . .

For years, White's standard continuation has been **12 Bc2.** At first glance, its only point is to allow the queen to provide additional support for the isolani. The actual purpose, however, is to make room for 13 Qd3, which in conjunction with 14 Bg5 and 15 Bxf6 poses mating threats at h7. It's a hackneyed plan, but potent nevertheless! After the routine **12 . . . Bb7?!** its effectiveness is fully revealed: **13 Qd3 g6** (Not pretty, but just about the only playable move to circumvent White's cleverly disguised trap; on the 'natural' 13 . . . Rc8 or 13 . . . Re8 he crashes through with 14 d5! Do you see the point? We'll have more to say about this fascinating combination in the next chapter.) **14 Bh6** (exploiting the freshly weakened dark squares) **14 . . . Re8 15 Rad1 Rc8** (*19*)

19



For a good illustration of White's initiative in isolani positions of this nature, we will follow the game Christiansen-Gheorghiu (Torremolinos 1977): **16 Bb3!** (having accomplished its mission of provoking the weakening 13 . . . g6, the bishop is now transferred to a more useful diagonal) **16 . . . Na5 17 Ba2 Nd5 18 Ne4 Rc7 19 Ne5** (in building up his attacking posture White is complying with many

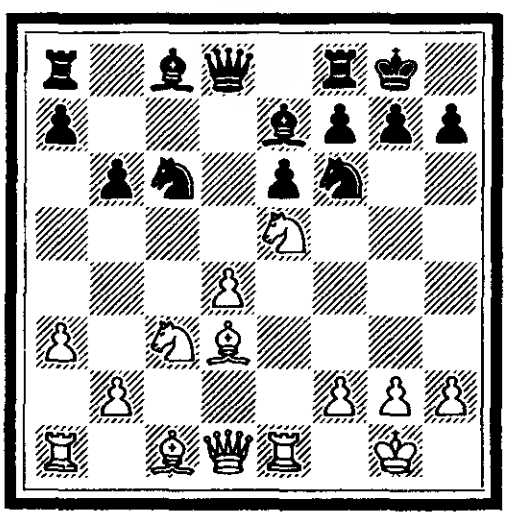
of the aforementioned general guidelines) **19 . . . Bf8** (Black only asks for trouble with 19 . . . f6?, e.g. 20 Nxg6 hxg6 21 Ng5! Nf4 22 Bxe6+! etc.) **20 Bg5 Be7 21 Bxe7 Rexe7 22 Bxd5!** (a good player knows that he can abandon a general principle, in this case 'Thou shall not trade pieces', if the result is to his benefit; note also that White has held on to his knights, the more vital minor pieces in isolani games) **22 . . . exd5** (if 22 . . . Bxd5, then 23 Nf6+ Kg7 24 Qh3! is similar to the game) **23 Nf6+ Kg7 24 Qh3! h5** (Black walks into a decisive mating net after 24 . . . Kxf6 25 Ng4+ Kf5 26 Qf3+ Kg5 27 h4+ Kh5 28 Qf4! Rxe1+ 29 Rxe1 f5 30 Nf6+! Qxf6 31 g4+! Kxh4 32 g5+ etc.) **25 Nxh5+! gxh5 26 Rd3 Qh8!** (the only chance for survival) **27 Rg3+ Kf8 28 Rg5 Re6 29 Qxe6!** (White transforms his initiative into a highly favorable endgame) **29 . . . fxe6 30 Ng6+ Kg7 31 Nxh8+ Kxh8 32**

Nf5? (37 . . . Nb5 was the best drawing chance) **38 Rxf5! Rxf5 39 Rd7+ Kg6 40 Rxb7 Rf4 41 Rxa7 Resigns.**

But if White's initiative is so lethal, why haven't theoreticians discarded Black's set-up altogether? Because chess theory, like the latest Spring fashion, is constantly evolving, Along the way, someone discovered that with a simple improvement, 12 . . . Ba6 intead of 12 . . . Bb7, Black can disrupt his opponent's evil intentions!

Which brings us to **12 Ne5** (*20*).

20



Homework

Set up the above position on your own chessboard and proceed to analyze it as thoroughly as possible. Spend as much time as you can or need. When you are reasonably certain that your analysis is complete, jot down all your calculations and evaluations, and then check them with those in the next chapter.

Use the following outline of variations and subvariations as your reference:

1. 12 . . . Nxd4? 13 Be3 and now:
   (a) 13 . . . g6
   (b) 13 . . . Nf5
2. 12 . . . Nxe5?! 13 dxe5 Nd5
3. 12 . . . Bd7
4. 12 . . . Bb7! (the main line) 13 Ba6!
   (a) 13 . . . Bxa6?!
   (b) 13 . . . Qc8

Recommended Reading: Supplementary Reference Sources

Calculation

Think Like a Grandmaster by Kotov. Pages 15-56 for chapters on 'Do you know how to analyze?', 'The tree of analysis', 'Forced and unforced variations', 'Different types of tree' and 'Selection

of candidate moves'. The book also contains helpful advice on endgame positions and adjourned games, plus exercise positions for the student to practise his analytical technique.

Evaluation

Alburt/Kastner articles in *Chesslife:* 'Learning to Think' April 1983 p.67, 'New Frontier' June 1983 p.44, 'Numbers Game' July 1983 p.22.

Isolani: General Theory

My System by Nimzowitsch, pp.213-227; **Pawn Structure Chess** by Soltis, pp.226-235; **Complete Chess Strategy** 2 by Pachman, pp.40-63; **The Middle Game Book I** by Euwe & Kramer, pp.241-256.

Isolani: Analysis

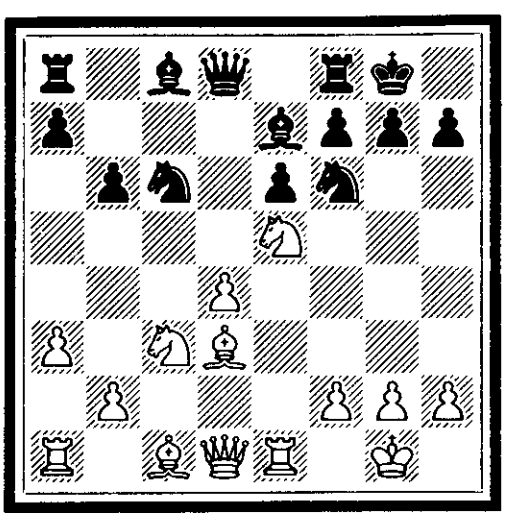
Sahovski Informator series; **Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings; Sicilian 2. c3** by Chandler; **Play the Tarrasch** by Shamkovich and Schiller.

5

Specialization (Part II)

We will now conclude our lesson on the isolated pawn. In Part I, I acquainted you with the merits of mastering one position at a time, and left you with a specific isolani middlegame position to practise on (*21*).

21

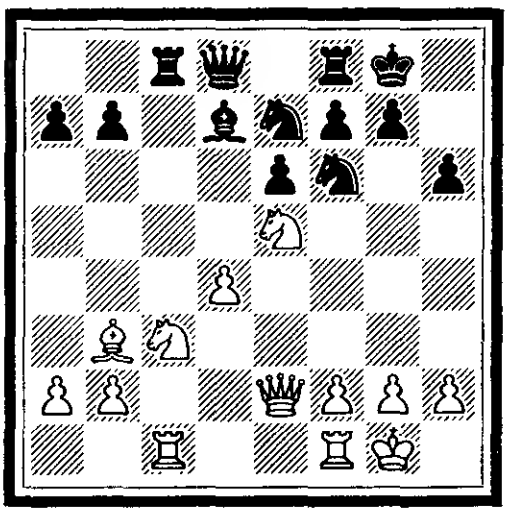


Whether your spare time has allowed as little as two hours or as much as two weeks for the assignment, you have already taken an important step towards chess mastery. In fact, many of you may have already acquired sufficient knowledge about the isolani game, that you are qualified to criticize the play of world-class grandmasters!

This remark may sound patronizing, but I really mean it. In fact, your supplementary reading material is chock-full of examples from grandmaster praxis in which the victim clearly lacks the knowledge which you now possess. Here is a perfect example from game 9 of the Korchnoi-Karpov World Championship Match, Merano 1981 (*22*).

White has a reasonable (though not necessarily favorable) isolani position. He should maintain the tension with 16 Rfe1!, which prevents the thematic 16 . . . Bc6 due to 17 Nxf7! Rxf7 18 Qxe6, winning. If 16 . . . Be8, then 17 Qd3 with the idea of Bc2, or 16 . . . Ned5 17 Nxd5 Nxd5 18 Bxd5 exd5 19 Qf3, and White has a slight advantage.

22



Instead, Korchnoi commits the cardinal sin of the isolani player - provoking unfavorable exchanges. Play continued:

16 Ne4? Nxe4 17 Qxe4 Bc6 18 Nxc6 Rxc6

After this second swap of minor pieces, Black has a clear edge. Exchanges magnify the weakness of the isolated pawn.

19 Rc3

To be consistent, White should trade one more time. After 19 Rxc6 bxc6! *(19 . . . Nxc6 20 d5!)* 20 Rc1 Qb6 followed by 21 . . . Rd8, Black keeps his edge, but he now has a weak pawn at c6 to counterbalance White's at d4.

19 . . . Qd6 20 g3 Rd8 21 Rd1

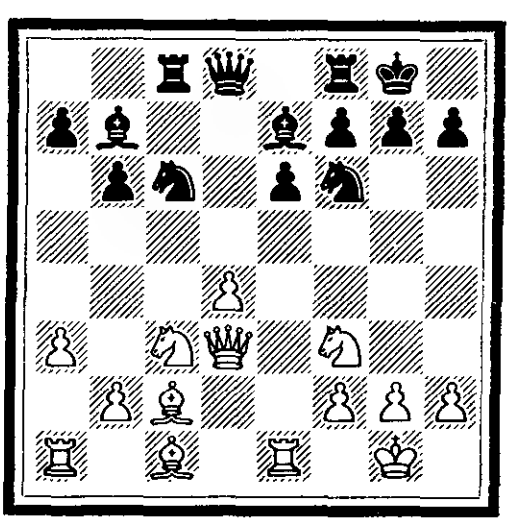
Threatening to liquidate his isolani with 22 Rxc6 Qxc6 23 Qxc6 Nxc6 24 d5. Karpov astutely sidesteps this attempt at simplification.

21 . . . Rb6! 22 Qe1 Qd7! 23 Rcd3 Rd6

Black has a powerful battery on the d - file, while White lacks the usual benefits associated with the isolani. Karpov, relying on his usual precise technique, notched the victory in 20 more moves. (The continuation was 24 Qe4 Qc6 25 Qf4 Nd5 26 Qd2 Qb6 27 Bxd5 Rxd5 28 Rb3 Qc6 29 Qc3 Qd7 30 f4 b6 31 Rb4 b5 32 a4 bxa4 33 Qa3 a5 34 Rxa4 Qb5! 35 Rd2 e5! 36 fxe5 Rxe5 37 Qa1 Qe8!! 38 dxe5 Rxd2 39 Rxa5 Qc6 40 Ra8+ Kh7 41 Qb1+ g6 42 Qf1 Qc5+ 43 Kh1 Qd5+ White resigns - Ed.)

* * *

23



We discussed this position in the previous chapter, and I asked you to find the refutation of Black's last move (13 . . . Rc8?).

14 d5!

The key move of the combination; White sacrifices his isolated d - pawn to open up lines of attack. Had Black tried 13 . . . Re8 or even 13 . . . Qd6 instead of 13 . . . Rc8, then 14 d5 would still work, for instance: 13 . . . Qd6 14 d5! exd5 *(14 . . . Na5 15 b4; 14 . . . Nd8 15 Bg5! g6 16 Nb5!)* 15 Bg5 g6 16 Rxe7 Nxe7 17 Nb5 Qe6 18 Nfd4 Qe5 19 f4 etc.

14 . . . exd5

From the practical standpoint, it is better for Black to play 14 . . . Na5, so that after 15 Bg5 g6 16 d6 Bxd6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 18 Qxd6 Nc4 he has some counterchances.

15 Bg5 g6

The obvious threat was 16 Bxf6 and 17 Qxh7 mate. On 15 . . . Ne4 16 Nxe4 dxe4 17 Qxe4 g6, White's attack is just about decisive after either 18 Qh4 h5 19 Bb3, or 18 Bxe7 Qxe7 19 Qxe7 Nxe7 20 Rxe7 Bxf3 21 Bb3! Ba8 22 Rxa7.

16 Rxe7! Qxe7 17 Nxd5, winning material.

An amazing incident involving the last diagram occurred in the 1971 Soviet Championship. Future World Champion Anatoly Karpov actually played 13 . . . Rc8, and his opponent, former World Champion Vasily Smyslov, overlooked the refutation (although he won anyway with 14 Bg5). But the incredible 'believe-it-or-not' story happened four years later at Milan 1975, in Game 5 of the Portisch-Karpov Final Play-off Match. From a Nimzo-Indian Defense, Karpov, who was now World Champion, stumbled into the same trap once again!:

1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 e6 3 d4 Bb4 4 e3 c5 5 Bd3 O—O 6 Nf3 d5 7 O—O cxd4 8 exd4 dxc4 9 Bxc4 b6 10 Re1 Bb7 11 Bd3 Nc6 12 a3 Be7 13 Bc2 Re8 14 Qd3. The same setting has arisen, with the minor difference that the black rook is already on e8. After the further 14 . . . Rc8? *(14 . . . g6* is best) 15 d5! exd5 16 Bg5 Ne4 17 Nxe4 dxe4 18 Qxe4 g6 19 Qh4 Karpov was busted, but still managed to hold the draw after 19 . . . h5 20 Rad1?! *(20 Bb3!)* 20 . . . Qc7 21 Bxg6 fxg6 22 Qc4+? *(22 Re6!)* 22 . . . Kg7 23 Bf4 Ba6!

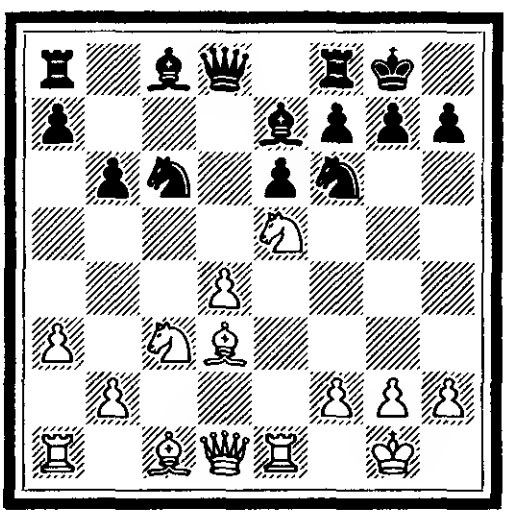
However, his compatriot, GM Yuri Balashov, was not so fortunate. In Petrosian-Balashov, USSR 1974 (the year before the above game was played!) there followed: 19 . . . Qc7 20 Bb3! h5 21 Qe4! (threatening *22 Qxg6+*) 21 . . . Kg7 22 Bxf7! Kxf7 23 Bh6!! (threatening a queen check at c4, d5 or e6) 23 . . . Qd6 (a few months later, GM Pomar resigned his game to S. Garcia after *23 . . . Bd6 24 Ng5+ Kf6 25 Nh7+!,* since *25 . . . Qxh7 26 Qf3+* wins!) 24 Qc4+ Kf6 25 Rad1 Nd4 26 Qxd4+ Qxd4 27 Rxd4 (threatening *28 Rf4* mate) 27 . . . Rc5 28 h4!, and Black resigned in anticipation of Bg5+ and Rd7.

Now consider this: if these top grandmasters can collapse in positions which you know like the back of your hand, what chance does an ordinary player have against you? When you take on an isolani position, think of it as playing a gambit, but without the material commitment!

Compare your Analysis

Let's turn our attention to the homework assignment I left you with in the previous chapter. On first glance it must surely have struck you that 12 Ne5 seems anti-thematic. It appears to be tactically dubious because the d - pawn is left hanging, and from the strategic point of view, White blatantly violates the guideline: 'Strive to keep pieces on the board, particularly your own knights'. So, wherein lies its justification? The answer to this question and many more will be revealed in the analysis that follows.

24



Analysis of 12 Ne5.

1. 12 . . . Nxd4?!

As the saying goes, 'The refutation of a sacrifice begins with its acceptance'. Further concrete analysis reveals, however, that White has dangerous counterchances.

13 Be3

Threatening the obvious gain of a piece with 14 Bxd4 *(14 . . . Qxd4?? 15 Bxh7+ Kxh7 16 Qxd4).* Indeed, White's 13th move appears so devastating that the *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings* (Vol.D, 1st Edition 1977) dismisses this line with: '12 . . . Nxd4? 13 Be3+-', implying that after Black's last error White's advantage is already decisive.

Needless to say, I disagree with this presumptuous evaluation, and I further caution readers to take such superficial evaluations with a grain of salt, especially when they are not accompanied by any supporting variations.

Black has a couple of reasonable looking defenses:

(a) 13 . . . g6?

This prevents the aforementioned Bxh7+ possibility, but suffers the more serious drawback of creating dark-square holes on the K-side. An analogous, but equally dubious idea is 13 . . . Kh8?, because apart from the text continuation *(14 Qa4),* White also has 14 Bxd4 Qxd4 15 Qf3 Bd7 16 Nxf7+! Kg8 17 Rad1! (value = 8.5).

14 Qa4!

This is clearer than 14 Bxd4 Qxd4 15 Qf3 Bd7 16 Rad1 Qc5, for instance: 17 Nxd7 Nxd7 18 Bxg6? fxg6!

14 . . . Nf5

Black cannot possibly survive after 14 . . . Bc5 15 b4 Be7 16 Rad1.

15 Bxf5 exf5

Or 15 . . . gxf5 16 Nc6 Bd7 17 Nxe7+ Qxe7 18 Qh4 (threatening the decisive *19 Bg5)* 18 . . . Nd5 19 Qg3+ Kh8 20 Nxd5 exd5 21 Bd4+ and wins.

16 Nc6 Bd7 17 Nxe7+ Qxe7 18 Qh4

As in the previous line, White has potent threats on the dark squares, for example: 18 . . . Nd5 19 Bg5 Qc5 20 Re5! Be6 (if *20 . . . f6,* then *21 Bxf6 Rxf6 22 Nxd5* wins) 21 Bf6 Qc6 (if *21 . . . h5,* then *22 Nxd5 Bxd5 23 Rd1* and wins) 22 Nxd5 Bxd5 23 Rxd5 Qxd5 24 Qh6 and mates.

(b) 13 . . . Nf5

The most tenacious defense. White wins a piece after 13 . . . Bc5? 14 b4.

14 Qf3!

White gets nowhere with 14 Nc6 Qc7 15 Nxe7+ *(15 Bxf5 Qxc6)* 15 . . . Nxe7. But a reasonable alternative to the text is 14 Bxf5 exf5 (White emerges with an endgame advantage after *14 . . . Qxd1 15 Raxd1 exf5 16 Nc6 Bc5 17 Bxc5 bxc5 18 Re7! Be6 19 Rxa7,* or *18 . . . a6 19 Na4!,* threatening *20 Nb6* and *20 Nxc5)* 15 Nc6 Qc7 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 Bxb6! Be6, when Black's open files and initiative compensate somewhat for White's Q - side majority (value = 5.5).

14 . . . Rb8

On 14 . . . Bd7 15 Bxf5 exf5 16 Rad1 White has a distinct initiative for the pawn. Black should play 16 . . . Qc8 17 Rc1!? *(17 Nxd7 Nxd7 18 Qxf5 Nf6 19 Qxc8 Raxc8 20 Bxb6 Bxa3!* is only equal) 17 . . . Qd8 18 Red1 Qe8 19 Nxd7 Nxd7 20 Qxf5 Nc5! 21 Nd5 Ne6 (value = 6.0).

15 Rad1

Premature clarification results from 15 Nc6?! Bb7. Better is 15 Bxf5 Bb7! (a necessary in-between move; Black will have few problems after *16 Be4 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 f5!* or *16 Bxh7+ Kxh7 17 Qh3+ Kg8 18 Rad1 Nd5)* 16 Qh3! exf5 17 Rad1, when White enjoys the better middlegame chances, especially after he recovers his pawn (value = 6.0).

15 . . . Bb7 16 Qh3 Qe8 17 Bb5!?

17 Bxf5 is similar to the last note.

17 . . . Qc8 18 Bd7 Nxd7

After 18 . . . Qc7 19 Bf4 Black is in hot water.

19 Nxd7 Nxe3 20 Rxe3

White will emerge the exchange ahead for a pawn and with the better chances. Black's strong bishop pair is offset by White's command of the open d - file (value = 6.0).

Conclusion: Accepting the sacrifice with 12 . . . Nxd4 is needlessly risky, although in this last variation Black's destiny is not nearly so hopeless as *E.C.O.* would have you believe.

2. 12 . . . Nxe5?! 13 dxe5 Nd5

An illogical continuation for Black, since White is permitted to increase his spacial advantage and dissolve his isolated pawn weakness as well.

14 Qh5

Exploiting the absence of Black's knight from its usual defensive post at f6. The immediate 14 Ne4 followed by 15 Qh5 is also advantageous for White.

14 . . . g6

Not 14 . . . h6 due to 15 Qf3 Bb7 16 Qe4 g6 17 Bxh6 Nxc3 18 Qxb7 etc.

15 Qf3 Bb7 16 Bh6 Re8 17 Ne4!

White's K - side initiative, spacial superiority, and dark-square control add up to an obvious advantage (value = 6.5). Tempting, though inferior to the text, is 17 Bb5, when Black escapes with 17 . . . Nxc3! 18 Qxc3 Qd5! 19 Bf1 Rac8 followed by . . . Red8.

3. 12 . . . Bd7?

A strategic error. Such a passive continuation does very little towards offsetting White's edge in space and mobility.

13 Bc2!

White intends to attack the K - side in the usual manner: 14 Qd3, 15 Bg5, 16 Bxf6 and 17 Qxh7 mate. Lacking any counterplay, Black is already positionally busted, for instance: 13 . . . Rc8 14 Qd3 g6 15 Bh6 Re8 16 Rad1. The position is similar to Christiansen-Gheorghiu (see previous chapter), but much worse for Black, since his bishop is misplaced at d7 (value = 8.5).

4. 12 . . . Bb7!

The main line. Now that his last undeveloped minor piece has been shifted to its optimum post, Black would seem to have promising middlegame prospects. The onus is clearly on White to demonstrate his justification for 12 Ne5 and his compensation for the vulnerable d - pawn.

As further evidence of the opening's vast transpositionality, the game Tarjan-Hecht, Lucerne Olympiad 1982, went: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 Bb4+ 4 Nbd2 b6 5 e3 Bb7 6 Bd3 c5 7 O—O cxd4 8 exd4 O—O 9 a3

Be7 10 Re1 d6 11 Nb1!? d5! 12 cxd5 Nxd5 13 Nc3, and now with 13 . . . Nf6 14 Ne5 Nc6 the Bogo-Indian Defense could have magically changed into our present position.

13 Ba6!

This aggressive foray is really the only consistent continuation, despite its deviation from a universally accepted isolani principle: 'Thou shalt not trade pieces willingly'.

The idea of 13 Ba6 is to exploit the opponent's overloaded bishop and sensitive light squares. Incidentally, this same motif does pop up from time to time in other openings, so absorb its nuances thoroughly.

13 . . . Qc8!

Black welcomes a multi-piece exchange, but the transactions have to be conducted on his own terms. 13 . . . Bxa6?! is weaker *(13 . . . Nxe5?* loses at least the exchange to *14 Bxb7)* because of 14 Nxc6 Qc7 15 Nxe7+ Qxe7 16 d5! Rfd8 17 Qb3! Bc8 18 Bg5 [7.5]. Here 16 Bg5 is also promising for White, for instance: 16 . . . Rfd8 *(16 . . . Bb7) 17 d5 Rfd8 18 Qf3* or *18 Qb3* [7.5]) 17 Ne4 *(17 d5!?)* 17 . . . Bb7 *(17 . . . Rd5 18 Qf3!* [7.5]) 18 Nxf6+ gxf6 19 Bh4 followed by 20 Qg4+ and 21 Qf4 [7.0].

14 Bxb7!

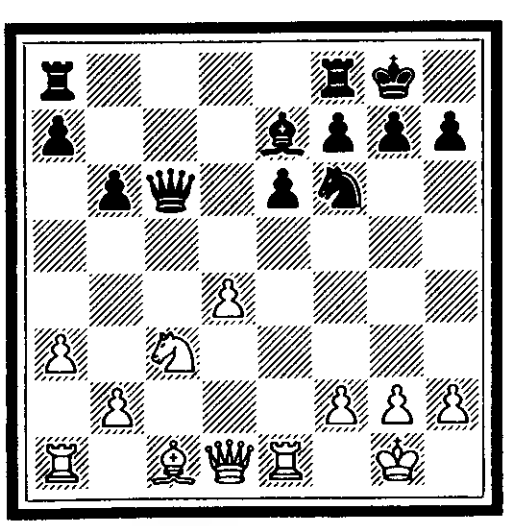
As before, precise play is required. White achieves less than nothing after 14 Nxc6 Qxc6 15 d5?! Nxd5 16 Nxd5 exd5, or 14 Qf3 Na5! 15 Bxb7 Qxb7 16 Qxb7 Nxb7 17 Nc6 Bd6.

14 . . . Qxb7 15 Nxc6!

Again, 15 Qf3 can be easily parried by 15 . . . Na5, as well as by 15 . . . Rac8 16 Bg5 Nd5! 17 Nxd5 *(17 Bxe7?! Ncxe7* [4.0]) 17 . . . Bxg5 18 Nb4 Na5 (more accurate is *18 . . . Nd8!,* threatening *19 . . . a5)* 19 Qxb7?! *(19 d5!* should equalize) 19 . . . Nxb7 20 d5 a5! [3.5], as in Sokolowski-Gheorghiu, U.S.A. Open 1980.

15 . . . Qxc6 *(25)*

25



The key position of this variation. Black threatens to blockade the isolani with 16 . . . Nd5 or attack it with 16 . . . Rfd8, 17 . . . Rd7, and 18 . . . Rad8. So, how does White proceed?

16 d5!

The point! This is White's primary justification for violating that important isolani principle back on moves 12 and 13. The moral here is: 'The endgame justifies the means'.

16 . . . Qc4!

The most active shelter for the queen. Of course, not 16 . . . Nxd5?? because of 17 Nxd5 Qxd5 18 Qxd5 exd5 19 Rxe7.

17 Qe2!

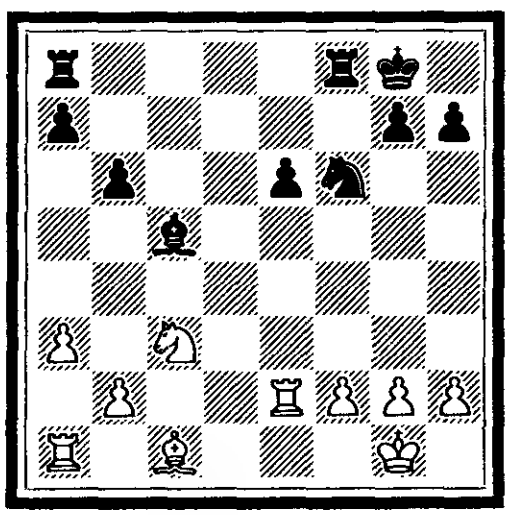
Actually winning a pawn by force! The interpolation 17 dxe6 fxe6 is inaccurate because Black can assume the initiative after 18 Qe2 Qxe2 19 Rxe2 Kf7! 20 Nb5 Nd5! 21 Nd4 Bc5 22 Nxe6 Rae8! 23 Ng5+ Kg8.

17 . . . Qxe2 18 Rxe2 Bc5!

Black cannot directly protect his e - pawn, so he posts his bishop on its most aggressive outpost.

19 dxe6 fxe6 *(26)*

26



One would normally stop analyzing at this juncture and commence the process of evaluating the position. Clearly, White can gain a material edge if he plays 20 Rxe6, or he can obtain a long-term structural advantage if he declines the booty. But will the material edge be only temporary in the first case, and how realistic are White's winning chances in the second?

Obviously, to form a proper assessment, further analysis is required.

So, here is another opportunity for you to concentrate your efforts on one concrete position - this time, an instructive ending. Take as much time as you need to work out the variations, and then compare your calculations and evaluations with mine below. Here are the three candidate moves we will be examining: (a) 20 Rxe6, (b) 20 Be3 and (c) 20 Bg5.

Revelations: Analysis of Position after 19 . . . fxe6

(a) 20 Rxe6

Reaping the fruits of his hard-earned labor is White's most tempting course. Yet, it is quite risky in view of Black's greater mobility and strong pressure on the f - pawn.

20 . . . Ng4!

Also tempting for Black is 20 . . . Rae8 21 Rxe8 Rxe8, but White should be able to shake off the pressure with 22 Bd2 or 22 Bg5.

21 Ne4 Bd4!

The only move that allows Black to regain the pawn and still maintain the initiative. White stands better after 21 . . . Bxf2+ 22 Nxf2 Nxf2 *(22 . . . Rxf2? 23 h3)* 23 Bd2!, or 21 . . . Nxf2 22 Nxc5 bxc5 23 Bd2 and 24 Bc3 (stronger minor piece - [6.0]), or 21 . . . Rae8 22 Nxc5 bxc5 23 Rxe8 Rxe8 24 Bd2! Re2 25 Bc3 Nxf2 26 Kf1 Rc2 27 Re1 [8.0].

22 Rd6

What else? Black was threatening 22 . . . Nxf2 23 Nxf2 Rxf2, as well as 22 . . . Rae8.

22 . . . Be5! 23 Rd1 Bxh2+

23 . . . Rae8 is also strong. In either case Black has enough of an advantage to discourage White from playing 20 Rxe6.

(b) 20 Be3 Bxe3 21 Rxe3

White is pursuing a 'safety first' policy, forsaking the immediate gain of a pawn in the hope of exploiting its weakness in the long run.

In Ribli-Kavalek, Tilburg 1980 (perhaps the only published grandmaster game featuring this line), Black found a sharp equalizer here:

21 . . . Nd5! 22 Rxe6 Nxc3 23 bxc3 Rac8 24 Re3 Rf4

Black has obtained sufficient counterplay to draw the game. His main threat is to force a repetition of position with 25 . . . Rfc4 26 Rc1 Ra4 27 Ra1 Rac4 etc. [5.0].

(c) 20 Bg5!

A subtle refinement of the idea behind 20 Be3. White will use this bishop to secure his K - side, after which he can begin operations on the target e - pawn.

20 . . . Rad8!?

Possible sidelines to explore include: 20 . . . Ng4 21 Bh4!, 20 . . . Nd5 21 Ne4!, and 20 . . . Kf7 21 Rd1 followed by 22 Red2, or 21 Rae1, 22 b4 and 23 Nb5.

21 Bxf6!

21 Rxe6 is premature due to 21 . . . Bxf2+! 22 Kxf2 Ne4+ 23 Kg1 Nxg5.

21 . . . Rxf6 22 Ne4! Rf5 23 g3!

And White, with the dominant minor piece and superior pawn structure, enjoys a small but persistent endgame plus [5.5].

Conclusion

The assessment of the entire 12 Ne5 line hinges upon the above sub-variations. Its drawish reputation was enhanced by Black's convincing play in the Ribli-Kavalek game. However,improvements for White in variation (c) may force a reappraisal of his chances. My own feeling is that the value of 12 Ne5, based on 'Predicted Results', is [5.5], roughly equivalent to White's normal opening (first move) advantage.

Epilogue

So, how did your own analysis fare? Were you not pleasantly surprised by your ability to uncover some of the hidden mysteries in the key position? Have you gained a new self-respect for your own talent and potential in chess? Did you discover those areas in which you require the most improvement? One thing is certain - whatever your strength was at the start of this two-part exercise, you are already a much better chess player, just for having undergone the experience!

Incidentally, do not be discouraged too much by holes in your analysis. Errors are part of the natural progression through the ranks. At the very least, you have improved your calculation/evaluation technique and learned a few new things about a critical middlegame position. I certainly did!

Perhaps you have differing viewpoints about the lines analyzed, or, even better, you found some resources that I overlooked.

Now that you are all well versed in the ramifications of the isolani, I will leave you with a follow-up assignment. Research and analyze in depth the concrete positions occurring after the moves 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 e3 Nc6 7 Bd3 cxd4 8 exd4 Be7 9 O—O O—O 10 Re1 Bf6! 11 Be4! Nce7 12 Qc2 and 12 Ne5 (cf. Smyslov-Ribli, Candidates Match, London 1983).

6

Training: The Question and Answer Game (Part I)

When asked about how he conceived his remarkable theories, Albert Einstein humbly admitted: 'I never stopped asking the questions of a child'. And indeed, the question-and-answer method (which includes the modern variants 'programmed instruction' and 'learning by doing') is a routine basis of education in the scientific world as well as the classroom.

Amazingly, very few chess manuals incorporate this teaching format, relying instead upon admonition, rules, and examples. The student is fed a diet of straight answers and is expected to digest all that he has learned. Very little room is left for stimulation and intellectual curiosity.

It is my contention, based upon considerable teaching (and learning) experience, that the most effective way of studying a chess game is to assume an active roll; to become, in a sense, one of the participants. Specifically, this means that the student should adopt a questioning attitude: 'Why did White play this move?' 'What was Black's threat?' 'Why couldn't White have played a different line instead?' 'Whom does this position favor?' . . . and so on. As the late Fred Reinfeld astutely observed, 'Not until the chess player asks and answers questions can his games begin to shed the irrational character which purely instinctive play gives them.' 'The thoughts of a great chess master during a game are after all mainly discussion and answer of such questions.'

In annotating the following game and those in the subsequent chapters, I have anticipated most of the relevant questions that the average player might ask during the course of a private lesson. I have also compiled a list of questions that the teacher could use to test his student's understanding and retention of accumulated knowledge.

To obtain the best results from this system, you should play over the notes to this game at your own leisurely pace. Pause after each indivdual question and try to tackle it independently before consulting its answer on pp. 64-66. Be certain that the solution is clear in your mind before continuing on to the next question-and-answer.

Upon completing your study of the game, come up with additional pertinent questions and then attempt to answer these yourself. Should a particular query leave you flustered, seek help from a higher authority, such as your local master or my own 'Lessons by Mail' service.

I have also provided some special **exercises,** designed to reinforce your newly-acquired knowledge. When you replay these games after a week or so, you will be quite surprised at the amount of information you have managed to retain.

Gudmundur Sigurjonsson - Lev Alburt

Reykjavik 1982

Alekhine Defense

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 Nb6 5 exd6

This is one of the most solid plans against the Alekhine. White is prepared to accept a small but lasting space advantage, against which passive play on Black's part is often fatal. Compare this with the 10th round game Ivanovic-Alburt from the same tournament, which went 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 g6 5 Be2 Bg7 6 c4 Nb6 7 Be3? dxe5 8 Nxe5 Bxe5! 9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 Nc6, and Black's initiative was sufficient for victory (see chapter 7).

5 . . . cxd6

By unbalancing the pawn structure in this manner, Black declares his fighting intentions. 5 . . . exd6 would maintain pawn symmetry and yield a more balanced position.

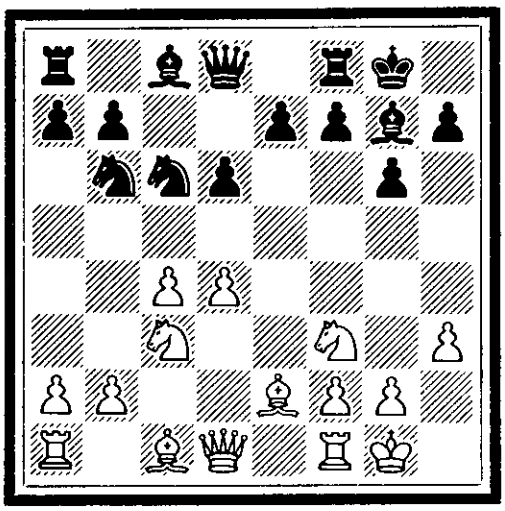
Q#1) Is 5 . . . Qxd6 playable? How should White reply?

6 Nc3 g6 7 h3

Q#2) Why did White play this tempo-wasting move instead of the natural 7 Nf3? Offhand, can you think of any other White systems in which a similar plan is adopted?

7 . . . Bg7 8 Nf3 O—O 9 Be2 Nc6 10 O—O *(27)*

27



Q#3) How would you evaluate this position? What are the two sides' advantages?

10 . . . Bf5

10 . . . e5 is best met by 11 Bg5!, provoking Black into misplacing his queen or else weakening his K - side after 11 . . . f6 or 11 . . . Bf6.

Q#4) What, if anything, is wrong with 10 . . . d5 ?

11 Be3

In the 5th round of the same tournament, Schneider tried Karpov's 11 Bf4!? against me, but with 11 . . . h6 12 Qd2 g5! 13 Be3 d5! Black obtained sufficient counterplay to win the game (see chapter 7).

Q#5) What, if anything, is wrong with playing 11 d5 ?

11 . . . d5!

Q#6) Why is 11 . . . d5 good in this position, but bad just one move earlier?

12 c5 Nc4 13 Bxc4

Q#7) (A tough one) What is Black's best way of coping with 13 Bc1 and the subsequent threat of displacing the knight with b2-b3 ?

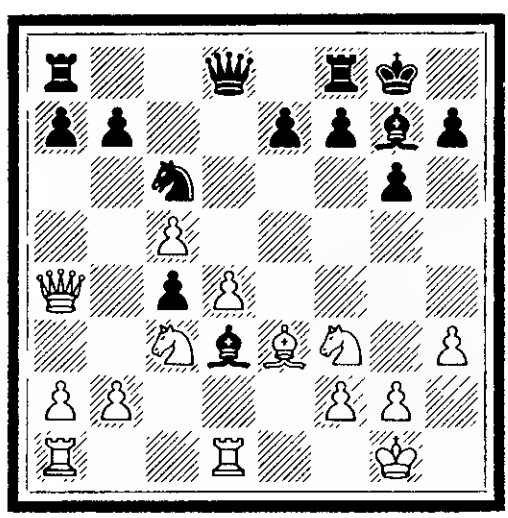
13 . . . dxc4 14 Qa4!

Q#8) Does this move permit Black to safely play 14 . . . Nxd4 ?

14 . . . e5! *(29)*

Let us first examine the older continuation 14 . . . Bd3 15 Rfd1 *(28)*.

28



Q#9) Is 15 . . . Nxd4 playable?

A brief history of the diagram position should not only provide you with a better understanding of this variation,but also give you a general appreciation of the process by which chess theory evolves.

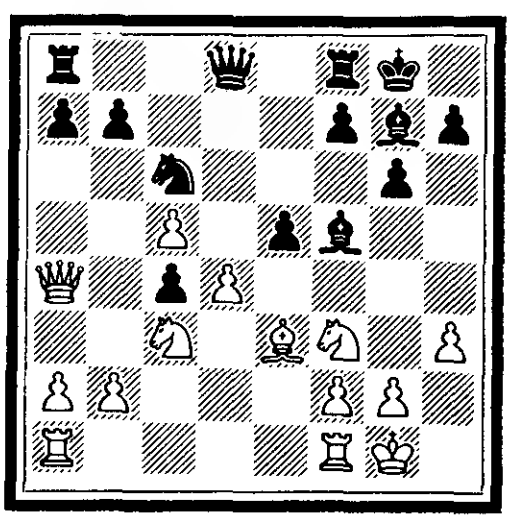
About eight years ago, I and several of my Russian colleages were able to prove that the above position favors White after 15 . . . f5 16 d5, or 15 . . . e5 16 d5! (much better than *16 dxe5 Nxe5 17 Nxe5 Bxe5 18 Rc1 Qe8!*, with a slight edge for Black according to GM Hort) 16 . . . Nd4 17 Ne1!

Q#10) Analyze the consequences of 17 . . . Bf5, 17 . . . e4, and 17 . . . b5.

We also analyzed the endgame stemming from 15 . . .Qa5 16 Qxa5 Nxa5, but preferred White's chances after 17 Ne1 Bf5 18 g4! Bd7 19 d5!, due to Black's stranded knight and White's strong center. So the problem of how to salvage this variation became a serious dilemma for Alekhine players.

Finally, after much trial-and-error analysis, one of my colleagues discovered the antidote; by slightly transposing the move order, the line suddenly becomes tenable for Black. Hence the origin of 14 . . . e5!, a move kept so secret that none of the opening manuals that we consulted (including *E.C.O.*) even mentioned it.

29



15 Rfd1!

Q#11) How should Black continue after 15 d5 ?

Q#12) How should Black respond to 15 dxe5 ?

15 . . . exd4 16 Nxd4

Q#13) What if 16 Qxc4 (or 15 Qxc4 exd4 16 Rfd1, transposing), threatening to win the d - pawn?

Much of the aforementioned Russian analysis was devoted to the continuation 16 Qxc4 Be6. Should White now move his queen to any square other than a4, he would be forced to surrender his four-pronged attack on the d - pawn, which would allow Black to make good use of his extra time.

The following two questions are difficult and will require an extra measure of thought and skill.

Q#14) How should Black best exploit the time he gains after moves such as 17 Qe2 ?

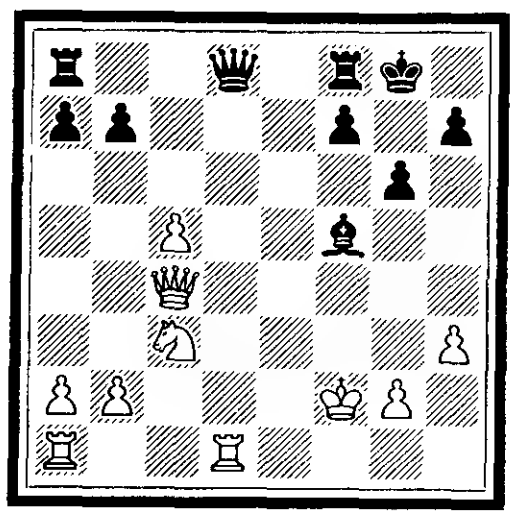
Q#15) On 17 Qa4, maintaining the attack on the d - pawn, what is Black's most efficient tactical resource?

16 . . . Nxd4 17 Bxd4 Bxd4 18 Qxc4

Q#16) Since White threatens to be a pawn ahead with 19 Rxd4, what should Black's 18th move be?

18 . . . Bxf2+! 19 Kxf2 *(30)*

30



The opening stage is over, and for these two grandmasters the 'real game' is only just beginning.

Q#17) Who stands better? Evaluate the above position from the standpoint of middlegame and endgame chances. Pay special attention to such strategic criteria as material, pawn structure, piece placement, and attacking potential.

19 ... Qf6

Q#18) Besides removing the queen from attack, what purpose does this move serve?

Viktor Korchnoi, a spectator and commentator at Reykjavik, mentioned the possibility of 19 . . . Qg5, which inhibits the forthcoming trade of queens and keeps the middlegame alive.

20 Qd4!

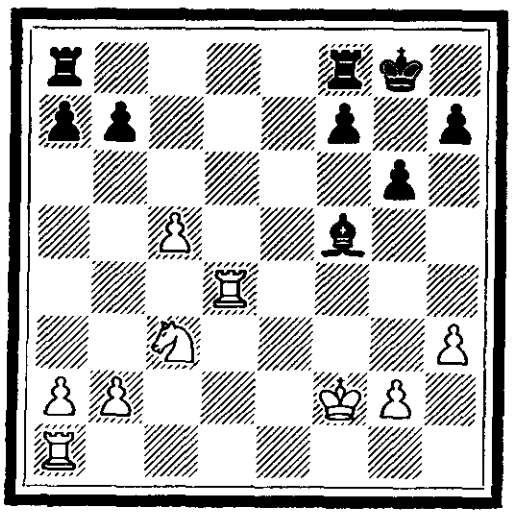
White (and Black, for that matter) has no fear of entering the endgame due to the considerations outlined in A#17. The alternative 20 Kg1 would lose a tempo and place the king on a less desirable square for the coming endgame.

20 . . . Qxd4+ 21 Rxd4 *(31)*

This position was known to me before the game. In Georgadze-Dvoretsky, USSR 1975, the players agreed to a draw, although it was felt at the time that Black stands a shade better.

It is in this kind of situation that amateurs are prone to errors of judgement. They do not fully comprehend that a transition from one

31



phase of the game to another (in this case, from middlegame to endgame) demands differing strategical considerations; for instance, the f2 square is an ideal post for the white king now, but was considered an unsafe haven just a couple of moves ago.

21 . . . Rac8

Black realizes that he should move a rook to c8 in order to restrain his opponent's Q - side pawns. However, the choice of which rook is not at all obvious. 21 . . . Rac8, as played, gives Black's other rook access to its natural post at d8. Yet, there are also definite merits to 21 . . . Rfc8, as will become more apparent later.

22 b4

Q#19) Why not 22 Rc4, 22 Rb4, 22 Rd5 or 22 Na4 ? How should Black play against each of these moves?

22 . . . b6! 23 Nd5! bxc5 24 Ne7+ Kg7

Again Black is faced with a difficult dilemma - should he play 24 . . . Kg7 or 24 . . . Kh8 ?

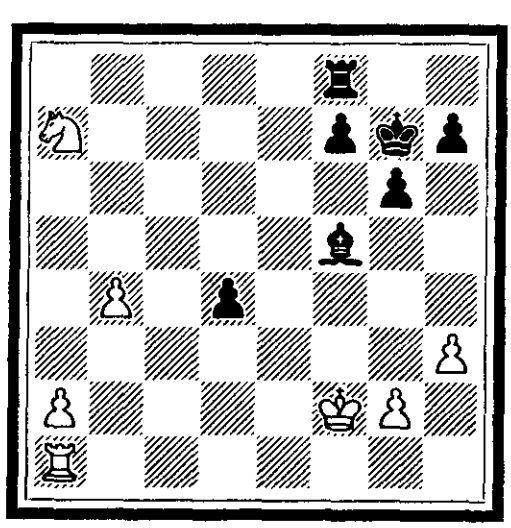
Q#20) What are some of the drawbacks to each of these moves?

Q#21) Return to the diagram after Rxd4. On 21 . . . Rfc8 22 b4 b6 23 Nd5 bxc5 24 Ne7+, how should Black proceed?

Q#22) Based on the concrete variations you have observed, what objective statement could be made about 21 . . . Rfc8 ?

25 Nxc8 cxd4 26 Nxa7 *(32)*

32



The game has entered yet another phase, as this particular endgame differs from the one that was reached after 21 Rxd4. To assess this new situation properly we must first take stock.

Q#23) What are the two sides' advantage in this position? Is it possible to work out who is winning?

Q#24) Can you suggest some reasonable candidate moves for Black?

26 . . . Rd8

This move maintains more options than the alternatives, e.g.:

(a) 26 . . . Rb8 27 Nc6 Rb6 28 Nxd4 Rxb4 29 Nxf5+ gxf5 30 a4, and White should win.

(b) 26 . . . Bc2 27 Nc6 d3 28 Nd4!, threatening 29 Nxc2 or 29 Ke3.

(c) 26 . . . d3 27 b5 Rd8 transposes into the game, but 27 Nc6! is also possible.

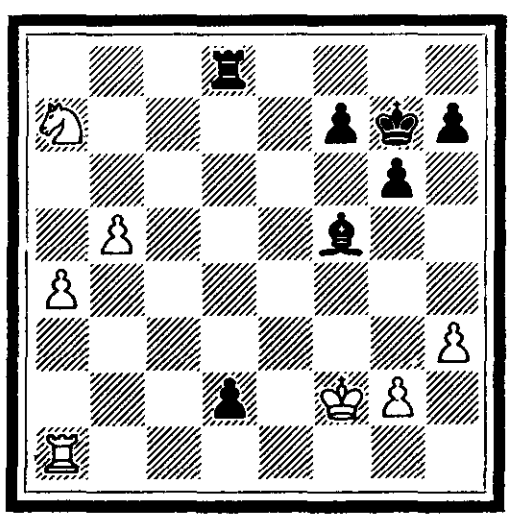
27 b5 d3 28 a4!

28 Ke3 is easily handled by 28 . . . Re8+ 29 Kf3 Re2 30 b6 Rb2 (or even *30 . . . g5, 31 . . . Be4+* and *32 . . . Rxg2+*). On 28 Nc6 Rd6 (threatening simply *29 . . . d2* and *30 . . . Bc2*) 29 Ne7 Be4 is strong. But 28 b6 is the toughest nut to crack.

Q#25) (For the more advanced players especially) What is Black's best line against 28 b6 ?

28 . . . d2 *(33)*

33



29 Rd1!

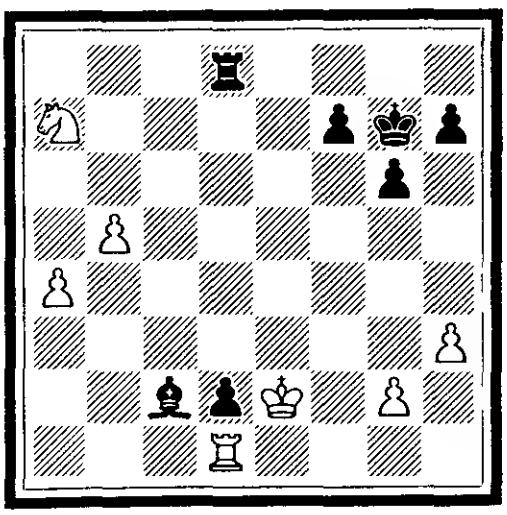
29 b6!? would set the clever trap 29 . . . d1=Q? 30 Rxd1 Rxd1 31 b7 and White wins, e.g. 31 . . . Rd8 32 Nc6! (but not *32 Nc8?? Rxc8!*), or 31 . . . Rb1 32 Nb5! However, after 29 b6 it is actually White who is the victim. By adding the seemingly innocuous 29 . . . Rd6!! to the above sequence, Black turns the tables - 30 a5 *(30 b7 Rb6 31 Rd1 Rxb7,* or *30 Rd1 Rxb6 31 Rxd2 Ra6)* 30 . . . d1=Q 31 Rxd1 Rxd1 32 b7 Rb1 33 a6 (the point of *29 . . . Rd6* is revealed - White does not have the resource *33 Nb5* available!) 33 . . . Be4 34 Nc8 Bxb7 etc.

A finesse such as 29 . . . Rd6, inserted in lieu of an apparently forced or otherwise obvious continuation, is termed an in-between-move. It is played with the primary intention of evoking a favorable

change in the position before the logical moves of a sequence are fully carried out. It is variously referred to in chess manuals as 'zwischenzug', 'interpolation' or 'intermezzo' to distinguish among fine shades of meaning, but I shall use the catchall 'in-between-move' to cover all such instances.

29 . . . Bc2 30 Ke2 *(34)*

34



The crucial moment has arrived. Black must now choose from a *dazzling array of variations:*

(a) 30 . . . Bxa4, as played by me, is only good enough for a draw.

(b) 30 . . . Bd3+ 31 Ke3! is sufficient, but not 31 Kxd2? Bxb5+ 32 Kc1 Rxd1+ 33 Kxd1 Bxa4+ 34 Kd2 Bd7 and wins.

(c) 30 . . . Bxd1+? 31 Kxd1 (Black has won the exchange, but how is he to stop the passed pawns?) 31 . . . Kf6 32 b6 Ke6 33 Nc6! (gaining a tempo by attacking the rook; after *33 b7? Kd7! 34 Nc8 Kc7* Black wins) 33 . . . Rd7 34 b7! Rxb7 35 Nd8+ and wins.

(d) 30 . . . Re8+! is the powerful in-between-move that I overlooked in the heat of the battle. On 31 Kxd2 Bxd1 (only now!) 32 Kxd1 Kf6 33 b6 Ke6 34 a5 (note that White no longer has the tempo-gainer *34 Nc6)* 34 . . . Kd6 Black should win.

Q#26) Analyze the consequences of 35 a6.

30 . . . Bxa4?!

I would attribute my oversight to a mental block. Evidently I had put such a high premium on the passed d - pawn, that I was psychologically unprepared to sacrifice it with 30 . . . Re8+! Grandmasters are only human!

The game now becomes very drawish.

31 Rxd2 Rxd2+ 32 Kxd2 Bb3 33 Kd3 Bd5 34 g3 Bg2 35 b6 Kf6 36 Kd4 Ke6 37 Kc5 Kd7 38 Nb5 g5 39 Nd6 f5 40 Nxf5 Bxh3 41 Nh6 Be6 42 Kd4 Kc6 43 Ke5 Bb3 44 Kf6 Kxb6 45 Kxg5 Kc5 46 Kf6 Kd4 47 Kg7 Draw agreed.

Answers to Questions

A#1) 5 . . . Qxd6?! is playable, in that 6 c5 can be met by 6 . . . Qe6+, avoiding the loss of a piece. However, after 7 Be2 Nd5 8 Nc3 g6 9 Nxd5 Qxd5 10 Bf3 White has the initiative and a spacial superiority. Other good sixth moves for White are 6 Nc3 and 6 Be3 (threatening *7 c5*).

A#2) The idea behind 7 h3 is prophylaxis. White can now calmly develop his knight at f3 without fear of an annoying pin with . . . Bg4. Two other examples which come to mind are the popular Petrosian Variation of the Queen's Indian Defence (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 b6 4 a3), and the Fianchetto Variation of the Caro-Kann Defense (1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 g6 5 h3).

A #3) The position offers approximately equal chances for the two sides. White has more space and greater maneuverability for his knights. Black, on the other hand, has a preponderance of center pawns and the possibility of a central break with either . . . d5 or . . . e5.

A#4) On 10 . . . d5? 11 c5 Nc4 12 b3 N4a5, the black knight is severely misplaced 'on the rim'.

A#5) It is a blunder which loses the c - pawn after 11 . . . Na5 12 Nd2 Rc8.

A#6) The difference here is that after 12 c5 Nc4 13 b3 Black has 13 . . . Nxe3 at his disposal.

A#7) The game Janosevic-Hort, Skopje 1967, provides an excellent illustration: 13 Bc1 b6! 14 g4 Bc8 15 b3 bxc5! 16 bxc4 cxd4 17 Nxd5 d3! 18 Qxd3 Bxa1. The active counterplay stemming from 13 . . . b6! constitutes the tactical justification of 12 . . . Nc4.

A#8) 14 . . . Nxd4? loses material, e.g. 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 16 Rfd1 e5 *(16 . . . Bd3 17 Rxd3! cxd3 18 Qxd4)* 17 Qxc4 and 18 Bxd4.

A#9) No, for the same reason as in A#8: 15 . . . Nxd4? 16 Nxd4 Bxd4 17 Rxd3!, and wins.

A#10) White wins material after 17 . . . Bf5 18 Qxc4, or 17 . . . e4 18 Nxd3 exd3 19 Qxc4. Best is 17 . . . b5!?, although 18 Nxb5! Nxb5 19 Qxb5 Rb8 20 Qa6! (threatening *21 Nxd3)* keeps White on top.

A#11) 15 . . . Nd4! 16 Nd2?! Bd3! is good for Black, as is 16 Qxc4 Nxf3+ 17 gxf3 Bxh3. Note that 16 Ne1 is harmless here compared with the analogous line 14 . . Bd3 15 Rfd1 e5. Black would continue 16 . . . b5! 17 Nxb5 (or *17 cxb6 Qxb6,* attacking the b - pawn) 17 . . . Nxb5 18 Qxb5 Qxd5, with the advantage of the bishop pair.

A#12) Black can play 15 . . . Bd3 16 Rfd1 Nxe5, transposing to a favorable continuation that has already been discussed under 14 . . . Bd3.

A#13) The sacrificial continuations 16 . . . dxe3 17 Rxd8 exf2+ 18 Kxf2 Raxd8 and 16 . . . dxc3 17 Rxd8 cxb2 18 Rxf8+ Rxf8 19 Rd1 b1=Q

20 Rxb1 Bxb1 look tempting, but are both slighly short of being fully sound. 16 . . . d3 17 g4 Be6 18 Qxd3 does not promise Black enough compensation for his pawn. Best is 16 . . . Be6 (see next question).

A#14) After 17 Qe2 (or *17 Qf1*) the sharpest is 17 . . . b6! If 18 cxb6?, then 18 . . . Qxb6 forks two pieces. White should reply 18 Na4, although Black keeps the initiative with 18 . . . Bd7 or 18 . . . Re8. Note that 17 Qd3 loses a piece immediately.

A#15) On 17 Qa4 (or *17 Qb5*) 17 . . . Bd7! Black unpins his d - pawn, thus threatening to capture the knight or bishop, and after 18 Nxd4 Nxd4 19 Rxd4 Bxa4 20 Rxd8 Rfxd8 21 Nxa4 Bd4 he has good winning chances.

A#16) Black can regain his pawn with 18 . . . Bxf2+!, as he in fact played. The bishop in such a case is termed a 'desperado', since prior to its imminent capture it attempts to do as much damage as possible.

A#17) I would rate the middlegame and endgame chances for the two players as about equal. Although material is even, the bishop slightly outweighs the knight. Black's minor piece will attain even greater superiority in the endgame, resulting from the presence of rival pawn majorities. White's endgame trump is his more advanced pawn majority. Note also that White's monarch is perfectly posted for a blockade of the enemy pawns, whereas Black's must travel some distance to perform the same task.

At first glance the middlegame seems to favor Black due to the exposed position of the white king. But Black's king is not so secure either. In fact, once White plays Nd5 and Qc3 his K - side attack will be the more potent. In addition, White controls the d - file.

A#18) 19 . . . Qf6 threatens a discovered check (e.g. *20 . . . Bd3+*). It also prevents 20 Nd5 on account of 20 . . . Qxb2+.

A#19) None of these moves furthers White's strategic goal - the advancement of his Q - side majority. Specifically, if 22 Rc4 Be6, or 22 Rb4 Rfd8! 23 Rd1 Rxd1 24 Nxd1 Rxc5 25 Rxb7 Rc2+, or 22 Rd5 Be6 23 Re5 Rfd8 24 Ke3 Bc4, or 22 Na4 Rc7 23 Rc1?! b5! 24 Nc3 Rxc5. These lines illustrate the advantages of 21 . . . Rac8 over 21 . . . Rfc8.

A#20) 24 . . . Kh8 25 Nxc8 (not *25 Nxf5?? cxd4,* or *25 bxc5? Rxc5 26 Nxf5 Rxf5+*, leaving Black a full pawn up) 25 . . . cxd4 26 Nxa7 would transpose into the actual game, with the crucial difference that the black king is one square further from the Q - side. In a close pawn promotion race, the loss or gain of a single tempo can drastically alter the outcome.

24 . . . Kg7, as played, allows the possibility 25 Nxf5+!? gxf5 26 bxc5 Rxc5. Here Black's extra pawn is doubled, thereby assuring White of good drawing chances.

A#21) Black would not only have the move 24 . . . Kf8! at his disposal, but after 25 Nxc8 cxd4 his a - pawn is protected. Black is

winning.

A#22) 21 . . . Rfc8 would prohibit 22 b4 on the one hand, but on the other hand it would justify defenses such as 22 Na4 or 22 Rd5 (refer to A#19). So, 21 . . . Rfc8 and 21 . . . Rac8 have equal merit.

A#23) White has two connected passed pawns, situated far from the black king's reach. White's rook is ideally posted behind these pawns and his king is close enough for a blockade of the enemy pawns. Black has a 3-2 K - side pawn majority. His passed d - pawn is well advanced, and his bishop can control the queening square. The R + B combination generally outclasses the R + N. It is also Black's turn to move, thus granting him the temporary initiative.

Comparing these dissimilar sets of advantage is a task better suited to computers; a human annotator would very likely call the situation 'unclear'. One may form a more precise opinion of the position only by doing a very thorough analysis of the forthcoming tactical complexities.

A#24) During the game Black considered 26 . . . Rb8, to restrain the Q - side pawns, 26 . . . Bc2, to aid the promotion of the d - pawn, the direct 26 . . . d3, and of course the move he played, 26 . . . Rd8.

A#25) 28 . . . d2! *(28 . . . Rd6 29 Rb1 d2 30 Rd1 Rxb6 31 Rxd2* is tenable) 29 Rd1 (if *29 b7 Be4!;* the complicated *29 a4!?* is fully treated in the notes to the game) 29 . . . Bc2 30 b7 Bxd1 31 Nc6 (after *31 Nc8 Bg4 32 b8=Q Bxc8* Black wins easily) 31 . . . Bf3! 32 Nxd8 d1=Q 33 b8=Q Qe2+ 34 Kg3 Qxg2+ 35 Kf4 *(35 Kh4 g5* mate) 35 . . .Qh2+, winning the queen.

A#26) 35 a6 Kc5 36 b7 Kb6 37 Nc8+ (if *37 Nb5 Rd8+!* - another in-between-move!; not the immediate *37 . . . Kxa6?? 38 Nc7+*, or *37 . . . Kxb5?? 38 a7)* 37 . . . Kc7, and black wins, e.g. 38 a7 Rd8+! (yet another in-between-move!) and 39 . . . Kxb7, or 38 Nd6 Rd8!

Spotting the In-Between-Move

Exercise #1

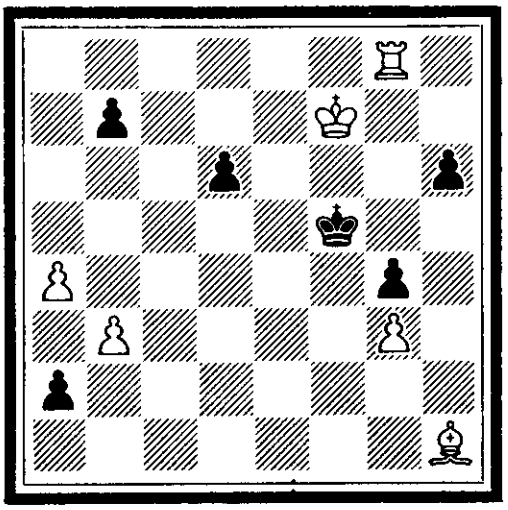
Diagram 35

In this study the principal variation goes 1 Re8 a1=Q 2 Be4+ Kg5 3 Rg8+ Kh5 4 Bg6+ Kg5 5 Bd3+ Kh5 6 Be2 Qd4 7 Bxg4+ Qxg4 8 Rxg4 Kxg4 9 b4 *(9 Ke6 Kxg3,* and wins) 9 . . . d5! 10 a5 d4 11 b5 d3, and Black stands better. White had a perpetual check, decided to try for more, but came up short in the endgame pawn race.

Q) *Is there an in-between-move in the above variation that would swing the race in White's favor? (Hint: if the black b - pawn was on b6 instead of b7, White could have promoted his a - pawn a move sooner).*

Bron, 1947

35



White to play and win

A) Correct is the in-between-move 1 Ra8!, to provoke 1 . . . b6 *(1 . . . a1=Q 2 Ra5+, 1 . . . d5 2 Ra5* and *1 . . . Ke5 2 Re8+ Kd4 3 Re1* all win for White), and then return to the principal variation with 2 Re8 a1=Q 3 Be4+ Kg5 4 Rg8+ Kh5 5 Bg6+ Kg5 6 Bd3+ Kh5 7 Be2 Qd4 8 Bxg4+ Qxg4 9 Rxg4 Kxg4.

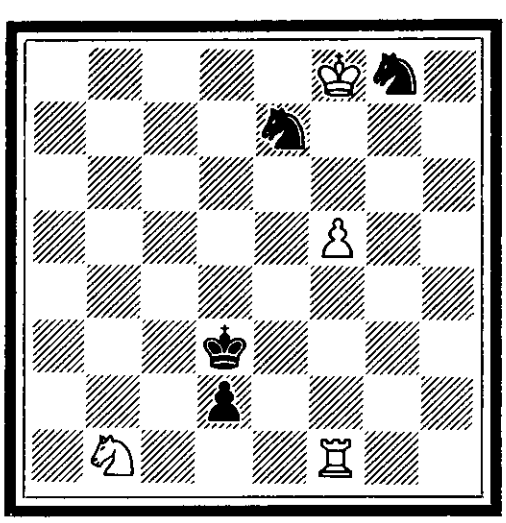
Q) *What is White's best continuation here? (Hint: count the race).*

A) Before pushing his pawns, White should play the prophylactic move 10 Ke6! (the impetuous *10 b4* only draws after *10 . . . d5)* 10 . . . d5!? (an attempt to block the a8-h1 diagonal, but unfortunately it opens another critical diagonal; on *10 . . . Kxg3 11 b4 h5 12 a5 bxa5 13 bxa5! h4 14 a6 h3 15 a7 h2 16 a8=Q* White wins) 11 Kxd5 Kxg3 12 b4 h5 13 a5 bxa5 14 b5! h4 15 b6 h3 16 b7 h2 17 b8=Q+ and wins, e.g. 17 . . . Kg2 18 Qg8+ Kh1 19 Ke4 a4 (without this pawn, Black would have a book draw because of his self-stalemating threat) 20 Kf3 a3 21 Qg2 mate.

Exercise #2

I. Zaitsev, 1962

36



White to play and win

The obvious tries must be analyzed first:

(a) 1 f6 Nxf6 2 Nxd2 *(2 Kxe7 Nd5+* and *3 . . . Ne3* draws, or *2 Rxf6 d1=Q 3 Rd6+Kc2! 4 Na3+ Kc1* and draws) 2 . . . Ng6+ (this draws more easily than *2 . . . Ned5)* 3 Kf7 Kxd2 4 Kxf6 Ke2! 5 Rf5 Nh4 and 6 . . . Nf3, with a book draw.

(b) 1 Nxd2 Kxd2 2 f6 Ke2! *(2 . . . Nxf6 3 Rxf6 Nc8 4 Ra6* followed by *Ke8-d7,* or *3 . . . Nd5 4 Rd6,* winning the knight) 3 f7! Kxf1 4 Kg7! Nf5+ 5 Kg6 *(5 Kh8 Nge7! 6 Kh7 Ke2 7 f8=Q* is a draw because the white king cannot escape from the corner) 5 . . . Nh4+ 6 Kg5 Nf3+! This check saves the game, e.g. 7 Kf4 Ne7 8 f8=Q Ng6+.

Q) *Can you find an in-between-move which would alter one of the variations favorably for White? (Hint: in the last line, if the f3 square is made unavailable to Black's knight, White will win with queen v. two knights.*

A) Correct is the in-between-move 1 Rf3+ Ke2 and only now 2 Nxd2 Kxd2 3 f6 Ke2 4 f7 Kxf3 (note that the capture of the rook is made on f3 this time, instead of on f1) 5 Kg7 Nf5+ 6 Kg6 Nh4+ 7 Kg5, and White wins.

7

The Question and Answer Game (Part II)

This chapter contains two further 'Question and Answer' games, which, among other things, should reinforce your knowledge of two of the current lines of the Alekhine Defense.

Bozidar Ivanovic - Lev Alburt
Reykjavik 1982

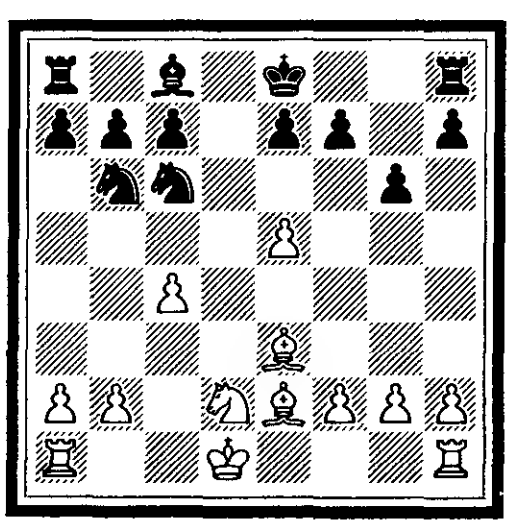
Alekhine Defense

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 g6 5 Be2 Bg7 6 c4 Nb6 7 Be3?
You may find it hard to believe that such a solid developing move can be a mistake - but it is! The initiative now completely passes to Black. 7 exd6 would have been wiser, transposing into the exchange Variation.

7 . . . dxe5 8 Nxe5 Bxe5!
It is highly unusual for Black to spend two tempi in the opening on the fianchettto of his king's bishop, only to exchange it three moves later for a mere knight. Perhaps this is why Ivanovic had not foreseen 8 . . . Bxe5! when he played 7 Be3. There is a valuable chess and human lesson to be learned from this, for the amateur and master alike: 'Beware of stereotyped thinking'.

9 dxe5 Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1 Nc6 11 Nd2 *(37)*

37



Q#1) How would you evaluate this position? What are the two sides' advantages?

11 . . . Be6

Q#2) Why not 11 . . . Nxe5 ?

During the game I seriously considered playing 11 . . . Bf5, which is the most active post for the bishop. After 12 g4 Be6 Black's 11th move becomes an 'in-between-move', to provoke another white pawn weakness. I rejected the idea on the general assumption that White would be able to use the extra g2-g4 push to his advantage after 13 f4, followed by Rf1 and f4-f5.

Q#3) Was I correct in my assumption, or is there actually a way for Black to gain the advantage after 11 . . . Bf5 12 g4 Be6 13 f4 ?

12 f4 O—O—O 13 b3 Rd7?!

Q#4) How should White meet 13 . . . Nd4 ?

After 13 . . . Rd7, the game gradually peters out into a drawish equality. Black can still retain some initiative in this position with 13 . . . f6! 14 exf6 exf6 and 15 . . . Rhe8. Clearly, even in this case the black bishop would be better placed at f5.

14 Ke1 Bf5

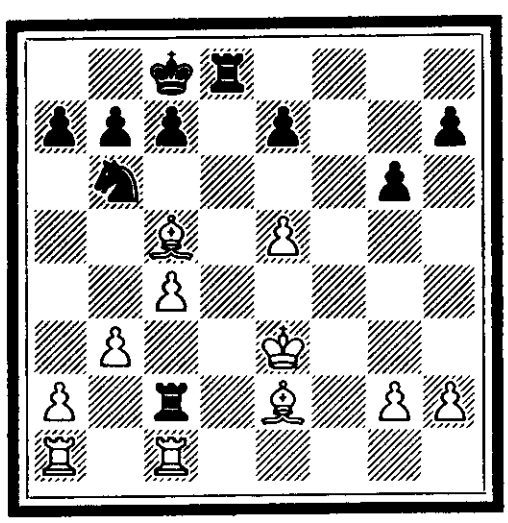
Necessary, to prevent 15 Ne4 followed by 16 Nc5 or 16 Ng5.

15 Kf2 Rhd8 16 Nf3 f6

Black stops 17 Ng5 and even threatens himself to penetrate with 17 . . . Nb4. His control of the open d - file is illusory, since all potential invasion points along that file are adequately guarded by enemy pieces. White's bishop pair neutralizes Black's temporary initiative, and the game remains evenly balanced.

17 Bc5 fxe5 18 Nxe5 Nxe5 19 fxe5 Rd2 20 Ke3 Rc2 21 Rhc1! *(38)*

38



Q#5) What makes White's last such a good move?

21 . . . Rxc1 22 Rxc1 Nd7 23 Bd4

Q#6) Why shouldn't White capture on a7 or e7 instead?

23 . . . c5 24 Bc3 Nb8!

The knight is heading for the strong outpost at d4.

25 a3 Nc6 26 g4 Be6 27 b4 b6 28 bxc5

White is envisaging a future rook invasion along the b - file.

28 . . . bxc5 29 h3 Nd4

With the threat of 30 . . . Nxe2 and 31 . . . Bxc4+. The powerful black knight outpost compensates for White's bishop pair.

30 Bd3 h5

Q#7) What is the general reasoning behind this move?

31 Bxg6 hxg4 32 hxg4?!

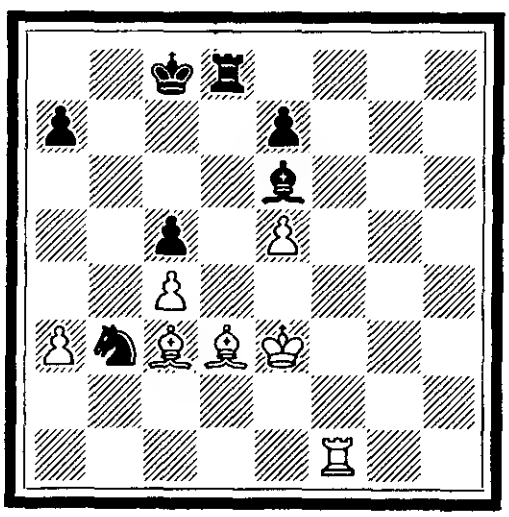
For the reason outlined in A#7, White should play 32 h4! I then intended 32 . . . Nf5+ 33 Bxf5 Bxf5, which leads to a drawish bishops-of-opposite-colors endgame.

32 . . . Bxg4 33 Rf1 Be6 34 Bd3

Q#8) After 34 Bxd4?! Rxd4!, how should Black meet 35 Bf7 and 35 Bf5 ?

34 . . . Nb3! *(39)*

39



Black starts to take command after this excellent move. It limits the squares available to White's rook and king, and stops the threat of 35 Rb1, 36 Be4 and 37 Rb7 due to 35 . . . Rxd3+! 36 Kxd3 Bf5+.

35 Rg1?! Rh8

It would have been much better for White to occupy the h - file and leave the less desirable g - file for Black's rook.

36 Bf1 Rh4! 37 Rg3 Kd7 38 Bd3 Nd4

Note that Black is in no hurry to capture the c - pawn. Instead he improves the position of his knight, making it difficult for his opponent to find any constructive moves.

39 Kd2 Rh2+ 40 Kd1 Ra2 41 Bxd4 cxd4 42 Be2 Bf5 43 Rg5

On this and the next move, White's best hope for survival lies in a trade of bishops with Bg4.

43 . . . Ke6 44 c5? Rxa3 45 Bb5 Rc3 46 c6 Kxe5 47 Rg2 Rb3

Two pawns down and with no visible compensation, White chose this opportune moment to resign.

Answers to Questions

A#1) Black has a clear advantage. His initiative (that is, the ability

to create threats) is of greater value than White's bishop pair. In addition, Black has the more compact pawn structure and safer king position.

A#2) It sells Black's advantage too cheaply. White can reply 12 Bd4 f6 13 Bxe5! fxe5, turning Black's extra pawn into a useless doubled pawn.

A#3) Black does gain the advantage, as a concrete analysis of the variations shows, e.g. 11 . . . Bf5! 12 g4 (otherwise *12 . . . Nb4* will be overwhelming) *12 . . . Be6 13 f4 O—O—O (threatening 14 . . . Nxc4,* as in the game) 14 b3 (not *14 c5! Nd5)* 14 . . . Nd4! (threatening *15 . . . Nxe2 16 Kxe2 Bxg4+*) 15 Bxd4 *(15 h3* is strongly met by *15 . . . h5!)* 15 . . . Rxd4, and the dual threats of 16 . . . Rxf4 and 16 . . . Rhd8 give Black a decisive edge.

A#4) After 13 . . . Nd4 14 g3! White's solid position is difficult to crack. Thus the difference between 11 . . . Bf5! 12 g4 Be6 and 11 . . . Be6 becomes apparent. By inserting the in-between-move into the sequence, Black provokes a fatal pawn loosening.

A#5) It prevents Black from doubling rooks on the second rank. After 21 Rhc1! Rdd2? 22 Rxc2 Rxc2 23 Bxe7, White wins a clear pawn.

A#6) The bishop gets shut in after 23 Bxa7? b6. Also good is simply 23 . . . Nxe5. On 23 Bxe7? Re8 and 24 . . . Nxe5, Black siezes the initiative.

A#7) The essential difference between the white and black armies is the bishop v. knight factor. It is a tried-and-tested maxim that bishops are preferable to knights when, as in this case, there are pawn clusters on both wings. So, by playing 30 . . . h5, Black is attempting to dissolve all of the K - side pawns and create a more favorable situation for his knight.

A#8) On 35 Bf7 Bxf7 38 Rxf7 Kd7! 37 Rf4 Rd1!, White's pawns are more vulnerable than Black's. Even worse for White is 35 Bf5 Bxf5 36 Rxf5 Rxc4.

Lars-Ake Schneider - Lev Alburt

Reykjavik 1982

Alekhine Defense

1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 Nf3 g6 5 Be2 Bg7 6 c4 Nb6 7 exd6

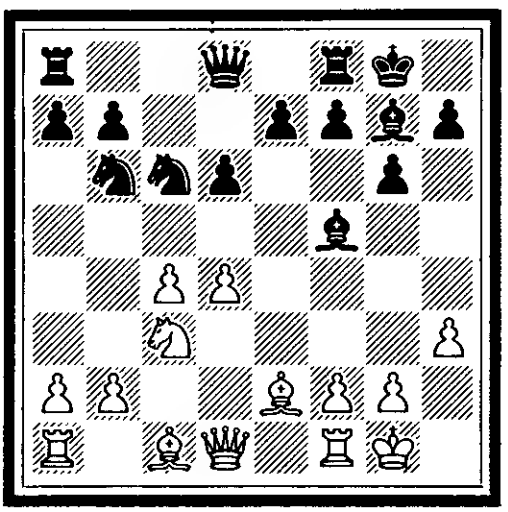
The so-called 'Exchange Variation' (there seems to be one in almost every major opening system!) is one of the most solid plans against the Alekhine. By resolving the tension in the center, White is prepared to accept a small but lasting space advantage, against which Black must seek active counterplay to avoid becoming overly cramped.

7 . . . cxd6 8 h3

Q#1) Why did White play this tempo-wasting move instead of the more natural 8 O-O or 8 Nc3 ?

8 . . . O—O 9 O—O Bf5 10 Nc3 Nc6 *(40)*

40



Q#2) What is your evaluation of this position? What are the two sides' advantages?

It is interesting to note that, via a transposition of moves, this same position was reached in the 3rd round game Sigurjonsson-Alburt (see p.57 of this book): 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5 3 d4 d6 4 c4 Nb6 5 exd6 cxd6 6 Nc3 g6 7 h3 Bg7 8 Nf3 O—O 9 Be2 Nc6 10 O—O Bf5.

11 Bf4!?

A subtle 'refinement' attributed to Anatoly Karpov. The older (and better) line 11 Be3 led to a sharp struggle in Sigurjonsson-Alburt after 11 . . . d5! 12 c5 Nc4 13 Bxc4 (the most efficient way of meeting Black's threat to capture on e3 or b2) 13 . . . dxc4 14 Qa4! e5!

11 . . . h6!

This threatens . . . e5, which if played immediately would allow White to seize the initiative with 12 Bg5! Qd7 (if *12 . . . f6,* then *13 Be3* followed by *c4-c5* or *d4-d5* is strong) 13 dxe5 dxe5 14 c5!

Q#3) Was there any concrete reason for Black to avoid 11 . . . d5, the plan he used against Sigurjonsson in a similar position?

12 Qd2

The most consistent follow-up.

Q#4) What would be wrong with 12 d5 ?

In his teens, Karpov preferred 12 Be3 to the text. His reasoning: now that Black has been provoked into weakening his K - side with 11 . . . h6 (the point of the 'in-between-move' *11 Bf4),* White retreats the bishop in order to meet 12 . . . e5 with 13 d5. After 12 Be3 I intended 12 . . . d5! 13 c5 (Karpov's *13 b3!? dxc4 14 bxc4 Rc8* allows Black strong counterplay against White's 'hanging pawns' on c4 and d4) 13 . . . Nc4, transposing back into Sigurjonsson-Alburt with an extra, though probably insignificant tempo (*. . . h7-h6)* for Black.

12 . . . g5!

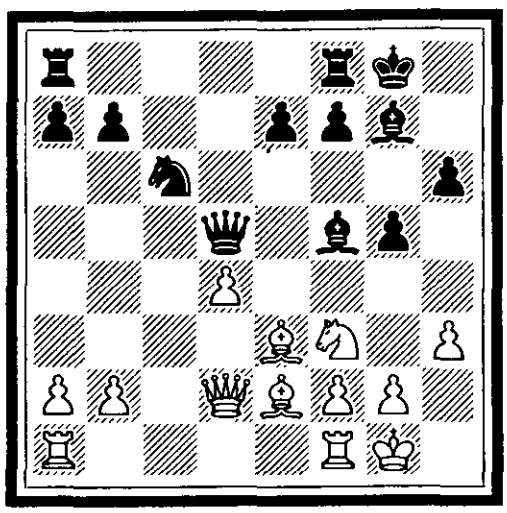
Q#5) Why can't Black simply defend his h - pawn with 12 . . . Kh7 ?

13 Be3 d5! 14 Nxd5?!

An ill-fated innovation. Better is the thematic 14 c5 Nc4 15 Bxc4 dxc4 16 d5 Nb4 17 h4 Bd3 18 hxg5! hxg5 19 Bxg5 Nxd5! *(not 19 . . . Bxf1* because the bishop is needed to protect the K - side), which led to an exciting draw in Adorjan-Eales, Groningen 1970.

14 . . . Nxd5 15 cxd5 Qxd5 *(41)*

41



Q#6) How would you evaluate this position in terms of each side's strengths and weaknesses?

16 Rac1

Gaining control of the open c-file and intending to dislodge the enemy blockader with 17 Bc4.

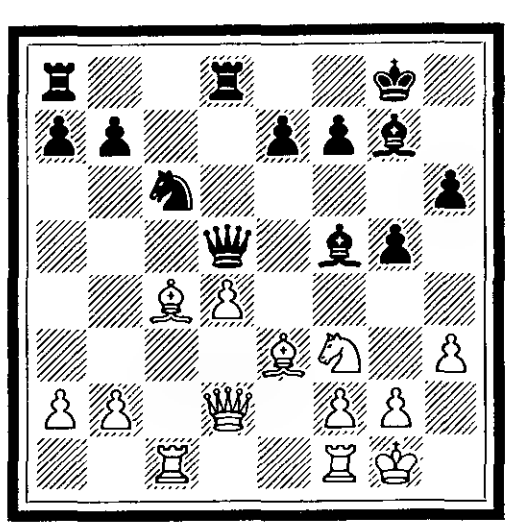
16 . . . Rfd8!

Q#7) Can Black get away with playing 16 . . . Qxa2, or is that pawn 'poisoned'?

I knew that one of my rooks belonged on d8; it was just a matter of solving that thorny problem 'Which rook?'. My choice of 16 . . . Rfd8 was guided mainly by general principles and experience: I felt that there were greater possibilities with my rooks posted on d8 and c8 rather than d8 and f8. Of course, some concrete analysis was also necessary to ascertain that Black's weakened K - side would not suffer from the absence of this important defender.

17 Bc4 *(42)*

42



A critical moment has arrived for Black.

Q#8) What is Black's best 17th move, and why?

For the past few moves, Black's main target of attack has been the weak d - pawn. With 17 Bc4 White has exposed another sensitive area; his knight on f3 will be unprotected after a subsequent . . . Bxh3. Therefore, if Black can move his queen to a square that keeps both f3 and d4 under attack, his threats will prevail. After careful calculation, Black decides to thrust his head into the lion's mouth, fully confident that he has the beast firmly under his control.

17 . . . Qe4!! 18 Rfe1 Bxh3!

There is no turning back now! Black's play vividly demonstrates the important chess and human quality of 'having the courage of your convictions'.

19 Bf1

What else? The alternatives seem to meet with rather straightforward refutations, e.g.:

(a) 19 gxh3 Qxf3, winning easily.

(b) 19 Nxg5 Qxg2 mate.

(c) 19 Bxg5 Qg4 (threatening *20 . . . Qxg2* mate and *20 . . . hxg5)* 20 Bf1 hxg5 21 Nxg5 Bh6 and wins.

19 . . . Bg4! 20 Nh2

Q #9) What happens after 20 Bxg5 ?

20 . . . Be6

Black has emerged unscathed from the complications, and he has been rewarded with an extra pawn. If now 21 Bxg5, then 21 . . . Qg6! 22 Be3 Nxd4 is very strong. The rest requires no comment.

21 Bd3 Qh4 22 Nf3 Qh5 23 Rc5 Bd5 24 Be2 Qg6 25 Qc1 g4! 26 Nh2 g3! 27 fxg3 Nxd4 28 Bf1 Nf5 29 Bd3 Qxg3! (threatening mate) **30 Rxd5 Rxd5 31 Nf1 Qd6** White resigns.

Answers to Questions

A#1) The idea behind 8 h3 is 'prophylaxis', a term Nimzowitsch often used in his teachings to describe the principle of restriction by stopping a potential threat before it can be carried out. In this particular case, White is preventing the annoying . . . Bg4, which would place the bishop on its optimal square, and threaten to exchange White's defender of the d - pawn.

A#2) The position offers equally good chances for both sides. White has an edge in space and piece mobility. This is counterbalanced by Black's central pawn majority and dynamic potential for expansion with either . . . d5 or . . . e5.

A#3) Yes, the presence of White's bishop on f4 instead of e3 changes matters considerably. If 11 . . . d5?! 12 c5 Nc4 13 b3! N4a5

(the point! - Black doesn't have the convenient *13 . . . Nxe3* here, so he must condemn his knight to a passive retreat 'on the rim') 14 Rc1 b6 15 cxb6 axb6 16 Qd2 Nb7 17 Nb5 Rc8 18 Rc3 Qd7 19 Rfc1 f6 20 Bc7! and Black is lost, Karpov-McKay, Stockholm 1969.

A#4) Black would reply 12 . . . Na5 13 Nd2 Rc8, winning the c - pawn.

A#5) It loses a valuable tempo, thus giving White the opportunity to play 13 d5! Na5 14 b3, with a big superiority in space and development.

A#6) Black stands a bit better. He has the smoother development, coupled with strong pressure on White's crippled, isolated d - pawn. These factors outweigh White's potential exploitation of his opponent's vulnerable K - side.

A#7) There does not appear to be any direct refutation. Still, it is unadvisable for Black to waste precious time when his K - side is so exposed. White could obtain sufficient compensation for the pawn after 17 h4!? g4 *(17 . . . f6??* loses the queen after *18 Bc4+*) 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Rfd8 20 Qb4!, or simply 17 Rc5 e6 18 Bc4.

A#8) The sharpest move is the one actually played, 17 . . . Qe4!!, as explained in the notes to the game. Of course, Black would also stand better after moves such as 17 . . . Qa5 or 17 . . . Qd6, since White's isolated d - pawn is a greater deficiency than Black's overextended K - side pawns.

A#9) Black wins a full piece with 20 . . . Qg6! 21 Nh2 (or *21 Be3 Bxf3)* 21 . . . Rxd4! 22 Qe3 hxg5.

8

The Question and Answer Game (Part III)

The following theoretically significant game is one of only two that Garry Kasparov lost on his way to becoming the 1981 Soviet co-Champion. It will test your positional reasoning as well as your tactical ability.

In annotating it in the question/answer format, I have anticipated most of the relevant questions that the average player might ask during a private lesson. I have also posed problems that the teacher could use to test his student's understanding.

To obtain the best results with the Q&A format, the reader should play over the notes to this game at his own leisurely pace. Pause after *each question and try to solve it before consulting its answer.* The solution should be clear in your mind before you continue to the next question.

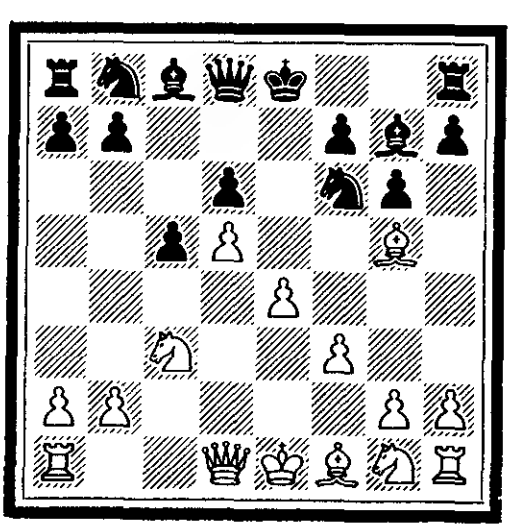
Boris Gulko - Garry Kasparov

1981 USSR Championship

Modern Benoni Defense

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 f3!? Bg7 8 Bg5 *(43)*

43



The move 7 f3 in conjunction with 8 Bg5 constitutes a relatively new plan against Black's Benoni set-up. In fact, 8 Bg5 was not even mentioned in the 1979 edition of *Encyclopaedia of Chess Openings!*

The idea is akin to a line in the Sämisch Variation of the King's Indian: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 O—O 6 Bg5 c5 7 d5 e6 8 Qd2 exd5 9 cxd5. With f2-f3 White strengthens his grip on the e4 and g4 squares, and in addition he fortifies the g2-d5 pawn chain. One of the major virtues of Gulko's system is its flexibility. White may later decide to attack the enemy Q - side (as in this game), or the K - side/center (with a well-prepared *f3-f4* and *e4-e5).*

The main purpose of 8 Bg5 is to pin the opposing knight and to provoke the weakening . . . h7-h6. One curious feature of White's system is that the development of his K - side pieces is postponed until the further course of play determines their optimum posts.

Q#1) What are some of the drawbacks to 7 f3 ? Are any of these significant?

8 . . . a6 9 a4

These moves are fairly routine in the Benoni. Black's 3-2 Q - side majority has a 'lust to expand', and White's 9 a4 prevents, at least for the time being, the thematic . . . b5 thrust.

Another common Benoni scheme, perfectly viable here, is 8 . . . Na6 followed by . . .Nc7, . . . a6, . . . Rb8 and . . . b5. Black need not fear 9 Bxa6, since as compensation for his shattered pawn structure he obtains the bishop pair and counterplay along the b - file. 8 . . . b6 is weaker because 9 a4! Ba6 10 Bb5+! Bxb5 11 axb5 gives White a strong Q - side bind coupled with pressure along the a - file.

Alternatively, Black has two K - side options. There is 8 . . . h6 ('kicking' the bishop) as well as 8 . . . O—O (transposing to the afore-mentioned Sämisch line after *9 Qd2),* both of which are discussed a little further on.

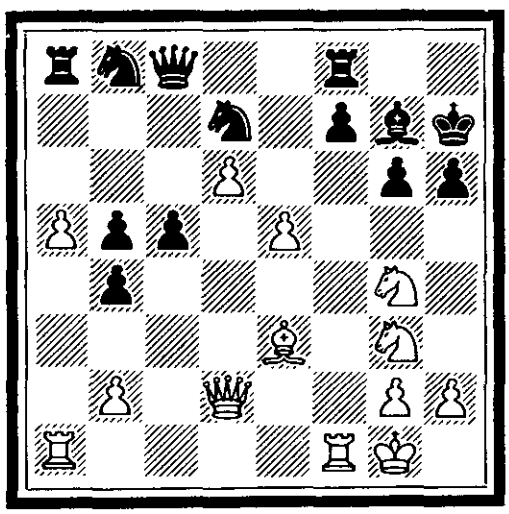
9 . . . Nbd7?!

A natural move, but Gulko's response brands it as dubious. For reasons that will soon become apparent, it is better for Black to postpone . . . Nbd7 until White plays Nge2.

One plan Black may wish to try is . . . h6 followed by . . . O—O. Several instructive pointers may be picked up from the game Keene-van Baarle (Berlin 1980): 9 . . . h6 10 Be3 (the tempo lost by this retreat is insignificant, since . . . *h6* is not so useful in these positions) 10 . . . O—O 11 Qd2 (as a matter of fact, White now gains a tempo; his useful developing move will force an unproductive defensive reply) 11 . . . Kh7 12 Nge2 (the plan *12 h4* and *13 h5,* with the idea of prizing open the h - file for a mating attack, is tempting but ineffective against the accurate defense *12 . . . Nbd7! 13 h5 g5! 14 Bd3 Ne5)* 12 . . . Nbd7 13 Ng3 Qa5 (if *13 . . . Ne5 14 h3!* followed by *f3-f4,* while *14 . . . g5* is answered by *15 h4!)* 14 Be2 *(14 Ra3!?* prevents Black's

next) 14 . . . b5 15 O—O b4 16 Nd1 Qc7?! (better is *16 . . . Qd8!*, intending *. . . Ne8-c7)* 17 a5! Nb8? *(17 . . . Re8!)* 18 Nf2 Bd7 19 f4 Bb5 20 e5! dxe5 21 d6 Qc8 22 fxe5 Nfd7 23 Bxb5 axb5 24 Ng4 *(44)*, and White has an overwhelming initiative on the K - side.

44



Q#2) (For the more advanced players especially). If Black now tries the defense 24 . . . h5, do you see White's combination?

Black's best course is probably 9 . . . O—O. White may then continue with the plan Qd2, Bd3, Nge2, O—O, Rab1 and b2-b4; the idea is a 'minority attack' against the black Q - side pawns, similar to the one Gulko uses in the game. It is possible, however, that Kasparov eschewed 9 . . . O—O because he feared a violent K - side pawn storm with g2-g4 and h2-h4-h5, followed by O—O—O. I doubt whether this attack is sound, but it is my conjecture that Kasparov may have been afraid to face it and therefore he chose to delay . . . O—O until White too committed himself to K - side castling.

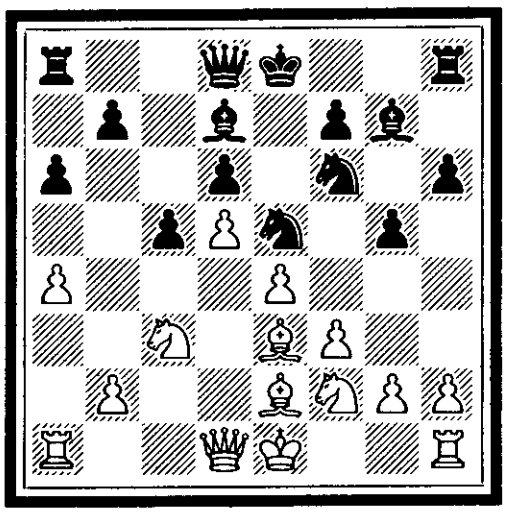
10 Nh3!

This unusual move, although perfectly justified, deviates from the accepted maxim 'A knight on the rim is grim'. As the 19th century master J. J. Löwenthal so eloquently put it: 'The judicious violation of basic principles marks the master mind'.

First of all, note that Nh3 was not playable earlier because of . . . Bxh3, which disrupts the white monarch's protective fortress. White's intention after 10 Nh3 is to transfer the knight to f2, from where it will help to control key central and K - side squares. It so happens that, given this particular pawn structure and piece formation, the knight coordinates ideally from f2.

10 . . . h6 11 Be3 Ne5 12 Nf2 Bd7 13 Be2! g5 *(45)*

45



Q#3) Why is it necessary for Black to weaken his light squares in this manner?

14 Qd2

Q#4) (A tough one). Is the tempting 14 h4 a playable alternative, In view of the possible replies 14 . . . g4, . . . Nh5 and 14 . . . gxh4 ?

14 . . . Qe7 15 a5!

A fine prophylactic move - one pawn restrains two. Now that Black's Q - side pawns are immobilized, White can prepare his minority attack with b2-b4. The timing of a4-a5 is important, however; had White played it on move 14, the response would have been 14 . . . b5! 15 axb6 Qxb6, with counterplay along the b - file.

Black could have avoided 15 a5 by playing 14 . . . b6, although his goal of Q - side expansion would nevertheless have been difficult to achieve; for example, 15 O—O Rb8 16 Bxa6. In fact, Kasparov soon abandons his Q - side plans and begins to undertake a minority attack of his own on the K - side.

15 . . . Rb8 16 Na4!

More prophylaxis. This stops any ideas that Black may have entertained about opening the b - file with 16 . . . Bc8 and 17 . . . b6 (or *17 . . . b5).* White welcomes the trade 16 . . . Bxa4 because after 17 Rxa4 he obtains the bishop pair and good play against the opponent's weakened light squares.

16 . . . Nh5?!

Gulko recommends 16 . . . Bb5, but adds that White is better after 17 O—O followed by Nh1-g3-f5!

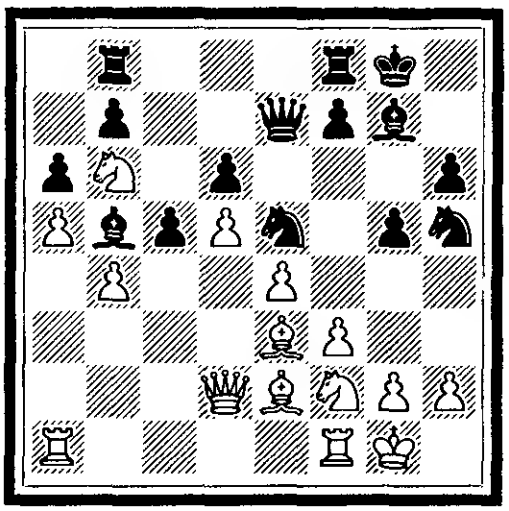
17 Nb6 Bb5 18 O—O O—O

As noted earlier, Kasparov castles K - side only after White does.

19 b4! *(46)*

'White stands better' - Gulko. With his last move, White is starting a very potent **minority attack.** The term is used whenever there is an advance by one or more pawns against a greater number of enemy

46



pawns. In general, its purpose is to create weaknesses in the opposing pawn structure that will negate the value of having a majority of pawns on that wing. In this particular position, Gulko's aim is to open the b - file and eventually attack the b - pawn with a battery of major pieces. Also, because the c8 square is controlled by White's knight, he will dominate the c - file as well.

19 . . . c4

Kasparov opts to keep the b - file closed, fully realizing that his c - pawn will soon fall as a result. However, he hopes to stem White's Q - side initiative long enough to mount a counteroffensive on the K - side, beginning with . . . f5.

Q#5) What would happen after 19 . . . Nxf3+, 19 . . . cxb4, and 19 . . . Bxe2 ?

20 Rac1 f5

The tactical justification is 21 exf5?! Rxf5 22 g4? Nxf3+ 23 Bxf3 Rxf3. The defensive 20 . . . Qc7 is best met by 21 Kh1! (not the hasty *21 Qc2 c3! 22 Bxb5 axb5 23 Qxc3?? Nxf3+, or 21 Bd4 Nf4 22 Bxe5 Nxe2+ 23 Qxe2 Bxe5,* giving Black more play than he deserves) followed by 22 Rc2 and 23 Rfc1.

21 Nxc4

On 21 Bxc4 Nxc4 22 Nxc4 Rac8, Black's two bishops and central pressure give him some compensation for the sacrificed pawn; for example, 23 Nb6! Rxc1 24 Rxc1 fxe4 25 Nxe4 Nf4 26 Bxf4 Rxf4 27 Nc8 Qe5 28 Ncxd6 g4!

21 . . . Bxc4!

The correct capture in this specific case. Black will be able to maintain his strong knight on e5 which will play a vital role in the K - side attack.

22 Bxc4 g4 23 fxg4!

Gulko shows that he is more than equal to the defensive task at hand. The alternative 23 f4 Nxc4 24 Rxc4 g3 25 hxg3 Nxg3 26 Rfc1

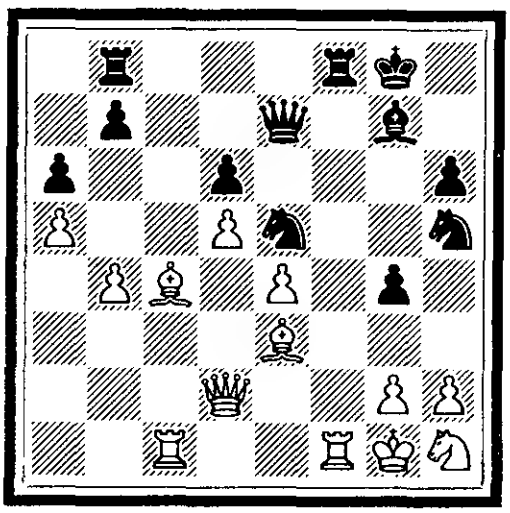
fxe4 27 Rc7 Qh4 leads to obscure complications.

23 . . . fxg4

Now what is White to do about the threat of 24 . . . g3 25 hxg3 Nxg3 ? The solution arrives in a neat package . . .

24 Nh1!! *(47)*

47



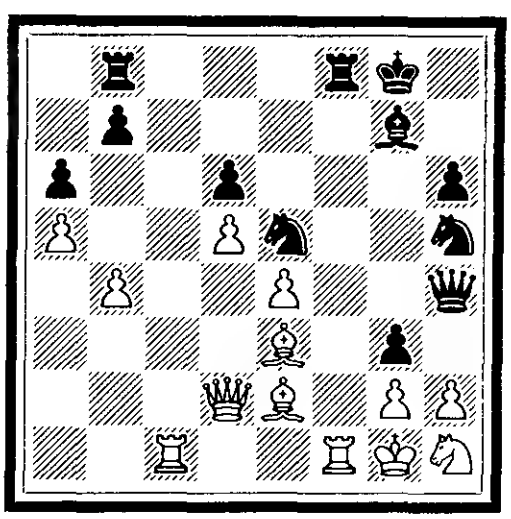
The ultimate in prophylaxis - Nimzowitsch would have been proud!

24 . . . Qh4

Q#6) On the sacrificial attempt 24 . . . Nf3+!? 25 gxf3 gxf3, how should White defend himself?

25 Be2 g3 *(48)*

48



26 Nxg3! Nxg3 27 hxg3

Q#7) Since Black now has two possibilities, 27 . . . Qxe4 and 27 . . . Qxg3, wouldn't it have been better for White to limit his opponent's options by playing 26 hxg3 (26 Bxh5?? Qxh2 mate) 26 . . . Nxg3 (26 . . . Qxe4?? 27 Bxh5) 27 Nxg3 Qxg3 instead?

Q#8) Should White possibly insert 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8 first before 27 hxg3 is played?

27 . . . Qxe4 28 Rxf8+ Rxf8 29 Bf4!

White doesn't mind initiating an exchange of rooks in this case, because his 29 Bf4 closes the f - file and leaves him with incontestable control of the c - file. Had Black tried 27 . . . Qxg3, then 28 Bxh6! His defensive chores nearly completed. Gulko can finally turn his

attention to converting his numerous advantages (bishop pair, extra pawn, c - file control) into victory.

29 . . . h5!? 30 Rc7

The Q - side is virgin territory for a rook penetration! The greedy 30 Bxh5 allows unnecessary counterchances with 30 . . . Nd3!

30 . . . Qb1+

An interesting sideline is 30 . . . h4 31 Rxg7+ Kxg7 32 Bh6+ Kf7 33 Bxf8 Kxf8 34 Qf4+ Qxf4 35 gxf4 Ng6 *(49).*

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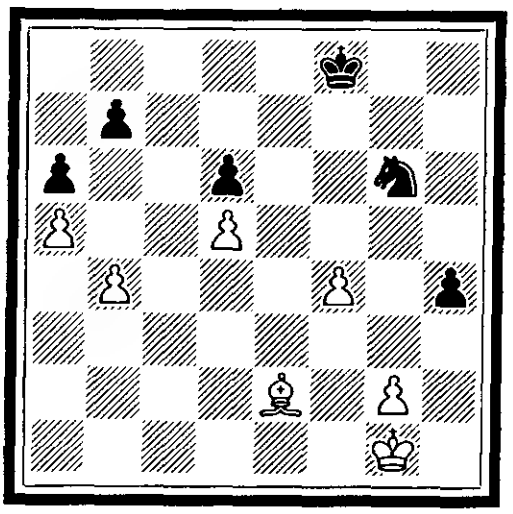

Q#9) What should White play now?

31 Qc1 Qg6

White wins after 31 . . . Qxb4 32 Rxg7+ Kxg7 33 Bh6+ Kf7 34 Qf1+, or 33 . . . Kg8 34 Qg5+.

32 Qc2!

The more direct 32 Rxb7 is undoubtedly good too, but this offer of a queen swap is even stronger. It is the kind of move that really frustrates an opponent, completely discouraging him from trying any last-ditch heroics. Both Gulko and Kasparov are fully aware that the endgame is an easy win for White, e.g. 32 . . . Qxc2 33 Rxc2 h4 34 Bxe5! Bxe5 35 gxh4, and despite the presence of opposite-color bishops, White's two connected passed pawns will triumph.

32 . . . Qe8 33 Qe4!

Again Gulko displays admirable patience; the enemy targets won't run away. In lieu of snatching material, White strongly centralizes his queen and improves his position.

33 . . . h4 34 gxh4 Qd8

After 34 . . . Ng6 35 Qxe8 Rxe8 36 Bh5 White wins.

35 Rxb7 Qc8

Q#10) Why doesn't Kasparov try 35 . . . Qxh4 instead?

36 Re7 Qd8 37 Bg5 Resigns.

Answers to Questions

A#1) (a) The move deprives the king's knight of f3, usually its

most active square. As we shall see, though, White has other effective posts for this piece.

(b) 7 f3 exposes the g1-a7 diagonal to a possible assault. Fortunately, there is no good way for Black to exploit this slight weakening.

(c) It reduces the mobility of White's light-square bishop. Yet, this piece is almost always difficult to activate in the Benoni, no matter which variation White chooses.

(d) White loses a tempo which can be better used for piece development. Yes, but even in many of the 7 Nf3 lines, sooner or later a preventive move such as h2-h3 becomes necessary anyway.

(e) 7 f3 is not as aggressive as, say, 7 f4 or 7 Nf3. True, but the motivation behind 7 f3 is prophylaxis, that is White wishes to stifle Black's counterplay in the center and on the K - side. White intends to defer offensive action until the middlegame.

Conclusion: of the various criticisms of 7 f3, none are overly severe.

A#2) 25 Bh6!! hxg4 26 Bxg7 Kxg7 27 Nf5+ gxf5 28 Qg5+ followed by 29 Rxf5 gives White unstoppable mating threats.

A#3) With the g4 square sufficiently controlled by pieces (thanks especially to the knight at f2!), White is threatening to win a piece with 14 f4. Even if the black knight did have an available retreat square (for instance, d7), it would still be a strategic error to let White dislodge the valuable outpost at e5 with f3-f4.

A#4) 14 h4!? works well against 14 . . . g4 due to 15 fxg4 Qc8 16 g5!, or 14 . . . Nh5 15 hxg5 Ng3 *(15 . . . hxg5 16 Qd2 f6 17 Rxh5! Rxh5 18 f4* wins material) 16 gxh6! Nxh1 17 hxg7 Rg8 18 Nxh1 and wins. Take note of the latent power of the Nf2 in these subvariations - it guards e4, g4 and h1. 14 . . . gxh4! appears anti-positional, but it is tactically justified. After 15 Rxh4 Nxd5! 16 Nxd5 Qxh4 17 Nc7+ Ke7 18 Nxa8 Rxa8 Black is a clear pawn ahead. Instead White should try 15 f4 Ng6 16 f5 Ne5 17 Rxh4!? (by no means forced, although after *17 Qd2 Rb8* Black has good prospects) 17 . . . Nxd5 (otherwise White will continue *18 Rh3* and *19 Qd2* with strong pressure on the h - pawn) 18 Nxd5 Qxh4 19 f6! Bxf6 20 g3! Qxg3 21 Nxf6+, with unclear complications. Conclusion: Gulko's 14 Qd2 gives Black more problems than 14 h4.

A#5) (a) 19 . . . Nxf3+? 20 gxf3 Bxa1 21 Rxa1 is much better for White, bishop + knight outweigh rook + pawn, especially in the middlegame.

(b) 19 . . . cxb4 20 Rab1! (weaker is *20 Bxb5 axb5 21 Qxb4 Nc4!)*

(c) 19 . . . Bxe2 20 Qxe2 cxb4 21 Rab1 grants White too much initiative on the b - file after 22 Rxb4, 23 Rfb1, 24 Nc4 and 25 Ba7.

A#6) Carefully! The most judicious defence is 26 Ng3 *(26 Bd3? Be5* with strong threats such as *27 . . . Qg7+*) 26 . . . Nxg3 27 hxg3 Qxe4 28 Bf2! *(28 Bxh6? f2+ 29 Rxf2 Rxf2 30 Kxf2 Rf3+ 31 Kg1 Bd4+*

is winning for Black) 28 . . . Qg4 29 Rfe1! with the idea of 30 Bf1.

A#7) No, because after 26 hxg3 Black plays the in-between-move 26 . . . Rxf1+!, e.g. 27 Rxf1 (if *27 Bxf1 Qxe4* or *27 Kxf1?? Qxh1+*) 27 . . . Qxe4! 28 Bxh5 Nc4 (playable now since there is no longer any rook on c1), and after Black regains the piece he obtains adequate counterplay. Compare this with Gulko's 26 Nxg3!, after which 26 . . . Rxf1+ could even be answered by 27 Nxf1!

A#8) The result is that after 27 . . . Nxg3 28 Nxg3 Qxg3 Black has seized control of the f - file under more favorable circumstances than in the actual game. If now 29 Rc7 (note that White doesn't have the blockading *29 Bf4* available), then 29 . . . Rf3! 30 Bxh6 Qf2+ wins for Black.

Conclusion: the dilemma of when to trade rooks and when not to trade is governed by the specific requirements of each position. Upon subjecting the individual variations to careful analysis, the pros and cons of trading rooks can then be evaluated in terms of concrete tactical possibilities and/or strategic considerations.

A#9) 35 Bxa6!! bxa6 36 b5, winning in all variations. Try to work out the tactics on your own.

A#10) Because of 36 Rxg7+! Kxg7 37 Bxe5+ dxe5 38 Qxh4.

* * *

The Art of Retreat

Retreating moves, such as 24 Nh1 in Gulko-Kasparov, can be both effective and surprising. We would like to acquaint you now with a special type of retreat, known as **backtracking.** This term is reserved for any unforced retreat in which a piece retraces its original steps, usually for the purpose of attack, defense, restraint, or regrouping. The backtracking maneuver is most often and most dramatically executed by the knight.

Q) *Can you think of any common opening variation or famous game in which knight backtracking is/was employed?*

A) The Breyer Variation of the Ruy Lopez is one such variation. It goes 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 O—O Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 O—O 8 d6 9 h3 and now 9 . . . Nb8. This knight will be rerouted to d7, where it will overprotect the e5 strong point, and if necessary can swing over to c5 or b6. In addition, 9 . . . Nb8 unblocks the long diagonal and the c - file, allowing for more fluid Q - side counterplay with a subsequent . . . Bb7 and . . . c5.

Possibly the most famous example from grandmaster praxis is the game Spassky-Fischer, Reykjavik 1972 (World Championship Match, Game 11): 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 a6 6 Bg5 e6 7 f4 Qb6 8 Qd2 Qxb2 9 Nb3 Qa3 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Be2 h5

12 O—O Nc6 13 Kh1 Bd7 and now 14 Nb1!? Spassky's diabolical knight retreat shocked the spectators and mightily disconcerted Fischer, who made a losing blunder just two moves later.

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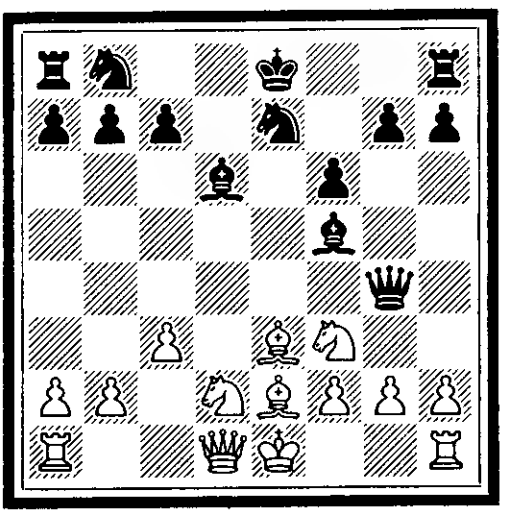

The diagram position arises from the following variation of Damiano's Defense: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 f6?! 3 Nxe5! Qe7 (White obtains a decisive attack after *3 . . . fxe5? 4 Qh5+*) 4 Nf3 (because it is a forced retreat, this does not qualify as backtracking; White should not fall into the trap *4 Qh5+ g6 5 Nxg6 Qxe4+* followed by *6 . . . Qxg6)* 4 . . . d5!? 5 d3 dxe4 6 dxe4 Qxe4+ 7 Be2 Bf5 8 c3 Bd6 9 Be3 Ne7 10 Nbd2 Qg4 (50).

Q) *How should White exploit the tenuous position of the black queen?*

A) White can trap her with the backtracking move 11 Ng1! Amazingly, the queen has 15 legal flight squares, but they all lead to heavy loss of material, e.g. 11 . . . Qxg2 12 Bf3 Qg6 13 Bh5, or 11 . . . Qh4 12 g3!

* * *

Exercising Restraint

Prophylaxis is a term borrowed from the medical field by Aron Nimzowitsch, the 'Father of Modern Chess'. It refers to the action taken by a player to negate a potential threat before it can arise. A very common example of prophylaxis is the move h2-h3, to prevent the pinning of a knight at f3 by a bishop on g4. The following example shows that even a World Champion can occasionally overlook a simple restraining motif.

In Karpov-Seirawan (Mar del Plata 1982) the diagram was reached from an unusual Winawer Variation of the French Defense: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 (perhaps suspecting a prepared line, Karpov varies from his normal *3 Nd2* Tarrasch Variation) 3 . . . Bb4 4 e5 Ne7 5 a3 Bxc3+ 6 bxc3 b6 (*6 . . . c5* is more usual; with the text move Seirawan is aiming to trade off his 'bad' bishop with . . . *Ba6)* 7 Nh3 (White

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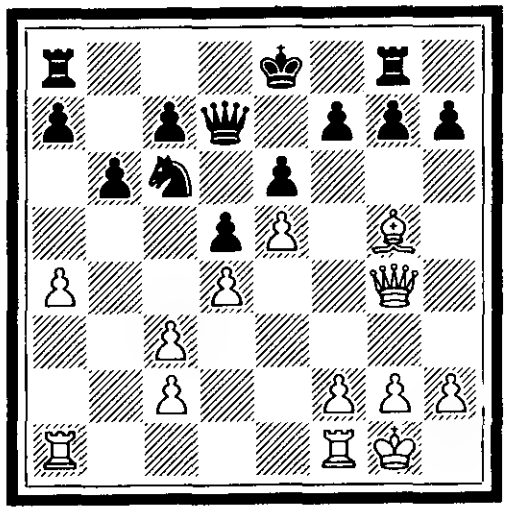


intends *Nf4-h5,* with K - side pressure) 7 . . . Ng6! (a nice restraining move which takes the sting out of White's plan) 8 a4 Ba6 9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 O—O Nb8! (Seirawan understands 'The Art of Retreat'; having accomplished his mission of exchanging his bad bishop for White's good one, he now reroutes his knight to the more active c6 post, secure in the knowledge that the time lost cannot be exploited by his opponent because of the closed nature of the position) 11 Qg4 Nc6 12 Nf4 Nxf4 13 Bxf4 Rg8 14 Bg5 Qd7 *(51).*

A strategic overview of this situation reveals that Black enjoys a marked superiority on the Q - side. He has: the much sounder pawn structure, enemy targets to attack on a4, c3 and c2, and weak squares for his knight to invade, such as a5 and c4.

White, on the other hand, holds an advantage in the center and on the K - side. He has: more space, thanks to the pawn on e5 which exerts a cramping influence on Black, the more secure king position, plus a bishop which severely restricts the enemy king's mobility, and some potential targets to attack on f7, g7 and h7.

If it were Black's turn to move, he could release himself from the K - side/central bind with 15 . . . f5!, e.g. 16 exf6 gxf6 17 Qh5+ Qf7! 18 Qxf7+ Kxf7, and Black has the better endgame prospects (good knight v. bad bishop, plus fewer pawn weaknesses), or if 16 Qg3 Qf7! followed by 17 . . . h6 and 18 . . . g5, enabling him to seize the initiative on the K - side as well.

Q) *In the diagram position, what is White's best prophylactic move to negate Black's 15 . . . f5 threat?*

A) The correct move is 15 Rfe1! This not only stops 15 . . . f5 because of 16 exf6 gxf6 17 Rxe6+, but also discourages 15 . . . h6 due to 16 Bxh6. In addition, 15 Rfe1 gives White possibilities of attacking the K - side with Re3-g3. Black should be content to equalize the game with 15 . . . Ne7 16 Bxe7 Qxe7.

There are other candidate moves which restrain 15 . . . f5, but these are not as accurate, for example:

(a) 15 Rae1 threatens f2-f4-f5 but abandons defense of the a - pawn. Black may either gamble on the win of this pawn with 15 . . .

Na5 16 f4 Qxa4 17 f5 Qd7 and hope to withstand White's initiative, or he can play it safe with 15 . . . Ne7 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 and renew his attack on the a - pawn later.

(b) 15 Bf6 (or *15 Bh4)* 15 . . . Ne7! 16 Bxe7 *(16 Bxg7?? Nf5)* 16 . . . Qxe7 is fine for Black. Any bishop move along the c1-h6 diagonal would permit 15 . . . O—O—O, threatening . . . f5 again.

(c) 15 Qh5 seems like a reasonable try. The major flaw is that it permits Black to relieve his congestion after 15 . . . h6 16 Bh4 g5! 17 Bg3 Rg6, with the plan of . . . O—O—O, . . . Rag8, . . . Ne7-f5 (or . . . *Na5-c4),* . . . g4 etc. If White attacks with 18 f4, Black may try the promising pawn sacrifice 18 . . . Ne7!? 19 fxg5 Nf5 20 gxh6 Rxh6.

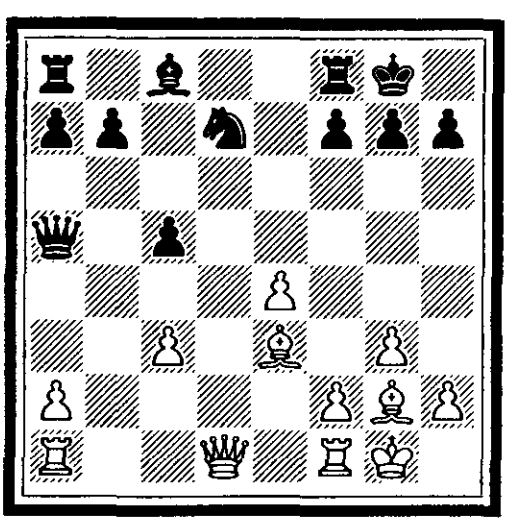
Instead of playing a prophylactic move, Karpov blundered with 15 f4? Perhaps he hoped that his threat of 16 f5 would force Black to weaken his dark squares with 15 . . . g6. But he overlooked (or underestimated) 15 . . . f5!, which gives Black a positionally won game, according to Yasser Seirawan. Play continued: 16 Qh5+ g6 17 Qh6 Qg7! (a queenless endgame is just what Black wants) 18 Qh3 Na5 (the knight restrains the enemy a- and c - pawns) 19 Bf6 Qf7 20 Qh6 (White now threatens to transfer his rook to h3 via f3) 20 . . . c6! (ingenious defense! - the idea is . . . *Rc8-c7,* to defend the h - pawn) 21 Rf3 Rc8. White's threats on the K - side have been neutralized, and Black is almost ready for decisive Q - side action. Seirawan should have won this game, but his later mistakes helped the tenacious World Champion to escape with a draw.

* * *

Question and Answer Training: Prophylaxis

In the diagram below *(52)* you see a position from the game Gulko-Kremenetsky, played in the 1983 Moscow Championship. It is White to move.

52



Q) *How does White prevent his opponent from completing his development, e.g. 1 Qb3 Nb6 2 Rfd1 Be6 or 2 . . . Bd7 with a good game for Black?*

A) White should play as Gulko did: **1 Qd5!** (preventing 1 . . . Nb6) **1 . . . Re8 2 Rfd1 Qxc3 3 Rac1 Qa5** (on 3 . . . Qa3 White replies 4 e5!; because of his back rank weakness, Black cannot take the e5 pawn, and it is very difficult for him to complete his development).

Q) *Black is planning to play 4 . . . Nb6, e.g. 4 f4 Nb6 5 Qxc5 Qxa2 with some counterplay. How should White prepare against 4 . . . Nb6 ?*

A) **4 e5!** Now after 4 . . . Nb6 White plays 5 Qxc5 Qxa2 6 Qc7 with strong pressure. It is important that Black cannot play 4 . . . Nxe5 5 Rxc5 Qa4 6 Rd4, with the threat of 7 Qxe5 and a back-rank mate.

Thus Black continued **4 . . . Rxe5 5 Qxe5 Nxe5 6 Rxc5 Qxc5** (bad is 6 . . . Qb6 7 Rxe5, with an easy win for White) **7 Bxc5 Bg4! 8 Bxb7!** Once again, White successfully exploits the threat of a back-rank mate. After 8 . . . Rb8 9 Bxa7 he wins a pawn.

Black decided to exchange rooks: **8 . . . Bxd1 9 Bxa8 a6 10 Bb7 Be2 11 f4! Nd7** *(53),* and now we have an endgame where the two white bishops are much stronger than the black bishop and knight.

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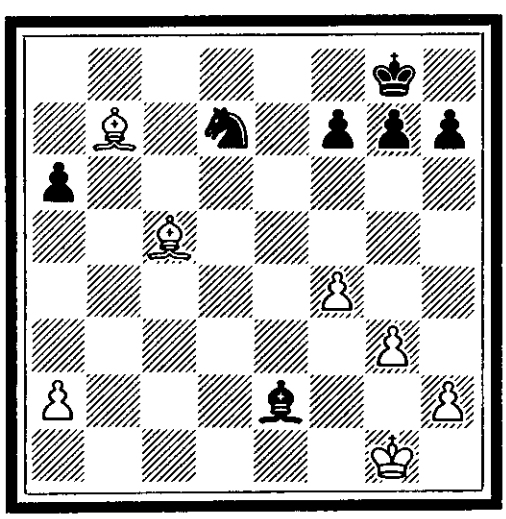


Q) *Where should White place his bishop in order to prevent Black's counterplay?*

A) **12 Bd4!** (as in the game), limiting the knight's movements. The seemingly attractive 12 Bb4 (with the idea of keeping Black's king in his corner) allows 12 . . . Nb6 13 Kf2 Bc4 14 a3 Nd5 15 Bd2 f5!, when Black constructs an impregnable fortress. White's king cannot break through, and the draw is unavoidable.

12 . . . Kf8

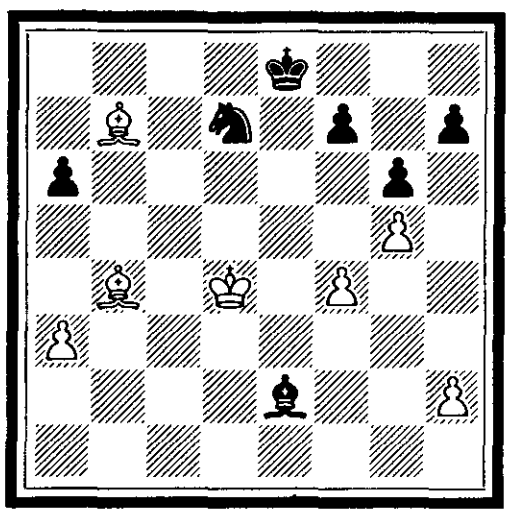
Q) *What plan White should choose?*

A) This plan consists of the following elements: (a) immobilize the black forces; (b) centralize the white king; (c) create new weaknesses in Black's pawn structure by advancing the K - side pawns.

13 Bd5! g6 14 Kf2 Bg4 15 Bb7! (15 Ke3 is worse because of 15 . . . Be6) **15 . . . Be6 16 a3 Bc4 17 Ke3 Ke7 18 Bc3** (opening the way for the white king) **18 . . . Bb5 19 g4 Ke8 20 Kd4** (centralization is completed) **20 . . . Be2 21 g5!** This move fulfils parts one and three of White's plan.

21 . . . Ke7 22 Bb4+ Ke8 *(54)*

54



Q) *How can White limit the mobility of the black forces even further?*

A) 22 a4! Bd1 23 a5! Be2

Now the black knight cannot move at all, as on . . . Nf8 White would exchange his dark-square bishop for the knight, and then win easily in the bishop ending by playing Kc5-b6 and Bxa6.

Q) *Find the easiest way to win.*

A) White should prepare an exchange of the light-square bishops; then his king will penetrate into the enemy camp, and Black should lose because of zugzwang.

24 Bc6 Kd8 25 Bd6! (taking away the last available square from the black king) **25 . . . Ke8 26 Bd5 f6** (Black also loses after 26 . . . Bf1 27 Bc4 Bxc4 28 Kxc4 Kd8 29 Kd5 Kc8 30 Kc6) **27 Bc4 Bxc4 28 Kxc4 fxg5 29 fxg5,** and Black resigned, since after 29 . . . Kf7 30 Kd5 he is in zugzwang.

* * *

How to Win a Won Position Without Taking any Chances

Gulko-Kupreichik

Riga 1985

White seems to have a big advantage thanks to the cut-off position of the black knight on a5, but he must be careful not to allow Black to launch a wild attack using his advantage in development.

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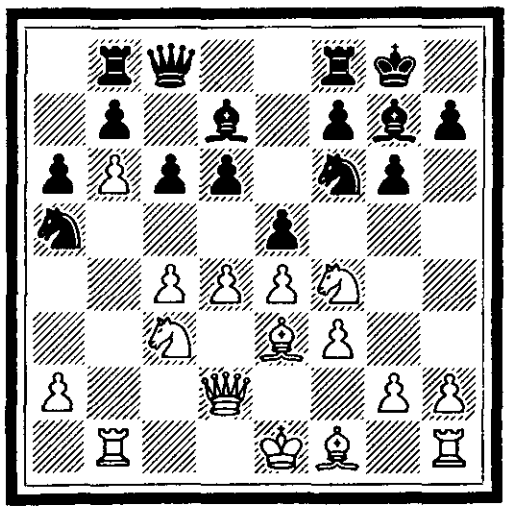


Q) *How can White achieve an advantage (small hint - positional advantage) while denying Black any real counterplay?*

A) 1 dxe5!

1 Nd1?! was tempting, but after 1 . . . exf4 2 Bxf4 Re8 3 Nf2 (after *3 Qxa5* Black could gain a strong attack by sacrificing his knight: *3 . . . Nxe4)* 3 . . . d5 4 Bxb8 dxe4 5 Be5 exf3 Black has a very strong attack, e.g. 6 Qxa5 Ng4 or 6 gxf3 Bf5 7 Rc1 Nd7.

A psychological element also played an important part in Gulko's decision not to grab material, but to strive for a **positional** advantage. Gulko's opponent, grandmaster Viktor Kupreichik from Minsk, is an outstanding attacking player, famous for his 'wild' sacrifices, but he is less good in defending inferior, 'boring' positions.

1 . . . dxe5 2 Nxg6!

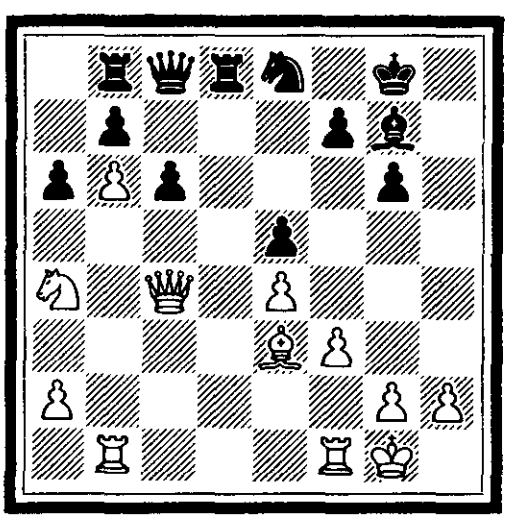
Keeping blocked the central e - file and the a1-h8 diagonal. Less good was 2 Nd1 exf4 3 Bxf4 Re8 4 Nf2 *(4 Qxa5 Nxe4!* with a strong attack) 4 . . . Nxc4 5 Bxc4 Ra8, with approximate equality.

2 . . . hxg6 3 Na4 (the knight is much better posted here than at d1; it is ready, for instance, to go to c5) **3 . . . Nxc4 4 Bxc4 Be6 5 Qc2**

White is completing his development. Because of his superiority on both sides of the board, he has a substantial advantage.

5 . . . Rd8 6 O—O Bxc4 7 Qxc4 Ne8 *(56)*

56



8 Qb3

Another prophylactic move. White is preparing for 8 . . . Nd6.

8 . . . Nd6 9 Bg5! *The black rook must leave the d - file.*

Had White played Bg5 on his 8th move, Black could have replied 8 . . . Bf6.

9 . . . Re8 10 Rbd1 Nb5 11 Nc5 Nd4 12 Qc4

White's main threat here is f3-f4. Black decided to sacrifice a pawn in order to activate his pieces: **12 . . . Bf8 13 Be3 Rd8 14 Bxd4 exd4 15 Rxd4 Rxd4 16 Qxd4 Bxc5 17 Qxc5,** *but he still lost the game* eventually.

9

The Question and Answer Game (Part IV)

I conclude this section with an analysis of two tournament games which were of crucial importance for the players involved.

Viktor Korchnoi - Robert Hübner

Chicago 1982

Slav Defense

1 Nf3 d5 2 d4 Nf6 3 c4 dxc4 4 Nc3 c6

What began as a Queen's Gambit Accepted has transposed into the Slav Defense, so called because it was first played by Slavic masters such as Alapin.

5 a4 Bf5 6 e3

Another popular line against Black's set-up is 6 Ne5 (usually followed by *7 Nxc4* or *7 f3* and soon *e2-e4),* known as the Krause Attack.

6 . . . e6 7 Bxc4 Bb4!

This is the Dutch Variation. Since one of White's chief strategic aims is a favorable e3-e4 advance, the idea behind 7 . . . Bb4 is to keep a sharp eye on the e4 square by attacking its primary overseer.

8 O—O O—O 9 Qb3!?

The main line is 9 Qe2. With the rarely played text move, Korchnoi wishes to exert some pressure on the Q - side.

9 . . . Qe7 10 Nh4

A routine maneuver in this type of position. White's knight 'on the rim' is only a temporary fixture; a trade of this piece for a bishop will soon be forced, after which White can effect his thematic pawn advance.

10 . . . Bg4

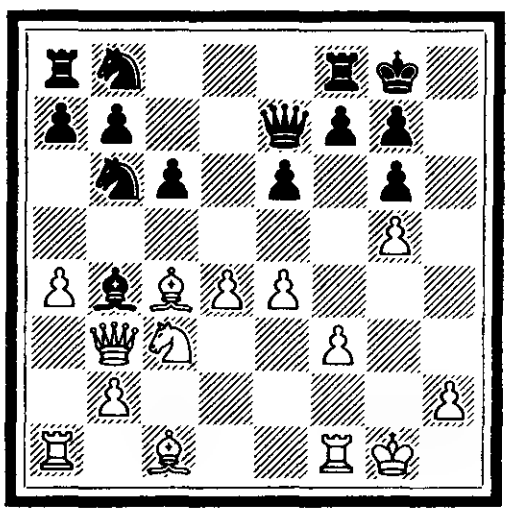
Q#1) Is the retreat 10 . . . Bg6 preferable?

11 f3 Bh5 12 g4 Bg6 13 g5

The two players are following a known theoretical path, and yet many of Korchnoi's future troubles can be traced back to his last move. Perhaps as a result of this game, 13 g5 will be replaced by the somewhat saner 13 Nxg6 hxg6 14 e4. One possible continuation is 14 . . . c5 15 d5 *(15 g5 Nh7!)* 15 . . . exd5 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 exd5 *(17 Bxd5 Nc6!)* 17 . . . Qd6, which leads to complications not unfavorable for Black.

13 . . . Nd5 14 e4 Nb6 15 Nxg6 hxg6 *(57)*

57



Q#2) Can you evaluate this position in terms of each side's advantages and disadvantages?

16 Be2?

An ill-fated innovation. At first glance, this retreat seems perfectly logical; it preserves the precious bishop pair and threatens 17 a5 N6d7 18 Na2 Bd6 19 Qxb7. But Hübner's ultra-sharp reply will soon reveal its flaw.

The best move seems to be 16 Na2!, as given by *E.C.O.* Now 16 . . . Ba5 would needlessly leave Black's bishop stranded, as was demonstrated by the game Karpov-Portisch (Portoroz/Ljubljana 1975). Also, on 16 . . . Nxc4 17 Nxb4 Nd6 18 Bf4! Nd7 19 Qa3 or simply 19 Kh1, White would stand better.

Q#3) Study carefully the position after 16 Na2 and put yourself in the role of theoretician. (For the more advanced players especially). Can you find an improvement for Black after 16 Na2 ?

16 . . . c5

Attacking the center and vacating c6 for the knight.

17 d5

Q#4) What happens after 17 a5 or 17 Na2 ? Analyze the consequences of each.

17 . . . exd5

Black stands better now. 17 . . . Bxc3 is inferior due to 18 bxc3 exd5 19 a5 c4 20 Qb5! Nc8 21 Qxd5, with a definite edge for White.

18 a5

This is all part of the White plan initiated on move 16. He hopes to drive the knight away from b6, then play Nxd5 to obtain an overwhelming position. 18 exd5?? would be a blunder because of 18 . . . Bxc3 and 19 . . . Qxe2.

18 . . . c4 19 Qd1 *(58)*

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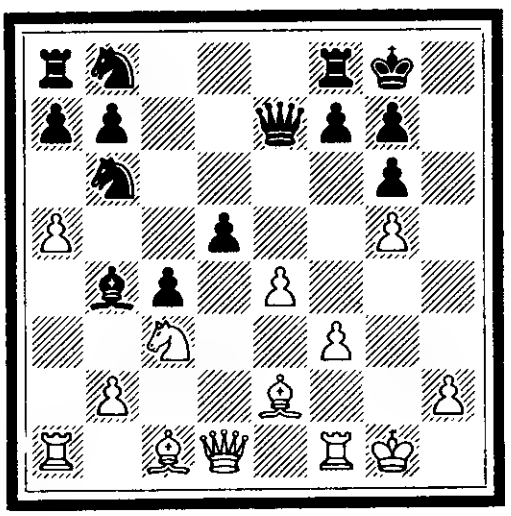


We have reached the critical moment of the game. Korchnoi probably foresaw this position prior to playing 16 Be2, and concluded that Black would be forced to play 16 . . . Bxc3 *(or 16 . . . N6d7 17 Nxd5)*, after which 17 bxc3 N6d7 18 Qxd5 leaves White with the potent threats of 19 Qxb7, 19 Bxc4, and 19 Ba3.

Hübner, however, has a little surprise of his own in reserve. Without peeking, can you predict Black's next move?

19 . . . d4!

This tactical finesse refutes 16 Be2 and turns the tide in Black's favor.

20 axb6

On 20 Nb5 *(20 Qxd4?? Bc5)* Black has 20 . . . d3!, threatening 21 . . . dxe2 as well as 21 . . . Qc5+. Relatively best for White is 20 Nb1, although Black can certainly lay claim to at least a slight advantage with 20 . . . N6d7 21 Bxc4 Qc5 22 Bd5 *(22 Bd3 Bxa5!)* 22 . . . Nc6 23 a6 bxa6 24 Rxa6 Nb6.

20 . . . dxc3 21 bxc3

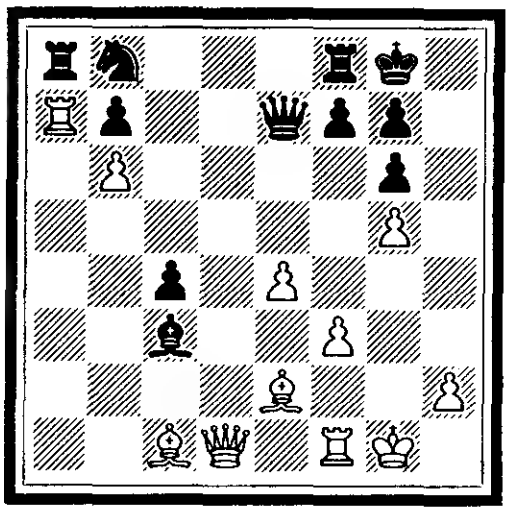
Q#5) After 21 Rxa7, how should Black reply?

21 . . . Bxc3!

The alternative 21 . . . Bc5+?! 22 Kh1 Bxb6 23 Bxc4 would squander away much of Black's advantage.

22 Rxa7 *(59)*

59



22 . . . Nc6!

Q#6) Why is this much better than 22 . . . Rxa7 ?

23 Rxa8 Rxa8 24 Kh1

Q#7) (An easy one) What is the point of this move?

24 . . . Rd8!

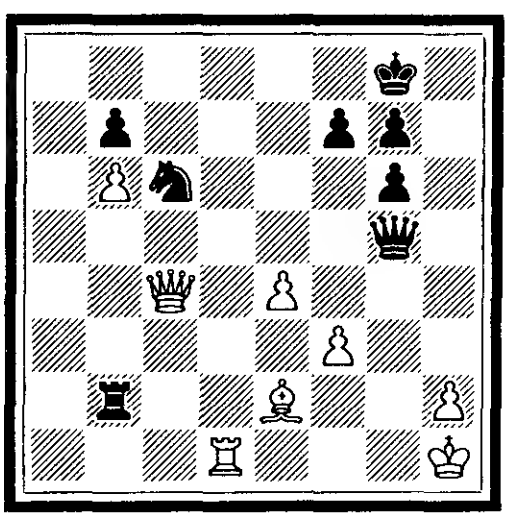
Black correctly assesses that his rook will serve a more important role on the d - file. If you don't see the reason yet, it will become apparent very shortly.

25 Qc2

Q#8) After 25 Qa4, what should Black play?

25 . . . Qb4 26 Be3 Bd2! 27 Rb1 Qa5 28 Bxd2 Rxd2 29 Qxc4 Qxg5 30 Rd1 Rb2! *(60)*

60



Under normal circumstances an exchange of rooks would be welcomed by Black, for that would leave him with queen + knight v. queen + bishop. It is an established principle that, with no other pieces left on the board, the Q+N work better in tandem than the Q+B duo. It so happens that the knight's unique and versatile movement better complements the queen's long-range striking power.

In this specific position, however, Black's rook is so active along his 7th rank that the advantages of NOT trading outweigh the merits of trading rooks. By preserving this powerful piece, Black can harrass the enemy monarch with a barrage of mating threats, and can stalk

the b - pawn as well.

31 Rd7

This rook is badly needed for the defense of White's back rank. Viktor Korchnoi, however, is a fighter by nature. Given equal opportunities to defend a position passively or to seek active counterplay, he will generally choose the latter.

31 . . . Rb1+ 32 Bd1 Qf4 (threatening 33 . . . Qxf3+) **33 Qe2 Rxb6**

Prosaic, yet effective! Black is now a pawn ahead without having had to surrender any of his previous advantages. A player with Mikhail Tal's temperament would perhaps have preferred the sharper 33 . . . Ne5!, e.g. 34 Rxb7 Nxf3 35 Rd7 (the threat was *35 . . . Rxd1+ 36 Qxd1 Qxh2* mate) 35 . . . Qg4! (threatening mate on g1 and the enemy rook) 36 Rd8+ Kh7 37 Qg2 Qxe4 (threat: *38 . . . Qe1+*) 38 Qh3+ Nh4+ 39 Kg1 Qe1+ 40 Qf1 Nf3+ 41 Kg2 Rb2+, and Black wins.

The remainder of the game was probably influenced by Korchnoi's usual time pressure.

34 Qa2 Ne5 35 Rd8+ Kh7 36 Qg2 Qh4 (stopping Qh3+) **37 Rd5 Rb1 38 Qf1 f6 39 Qe2 g5 40 Kg1 Qh3 41 Qc2** (no better is 41 Kf2 Qxh2+ 42 Ke3 Qf4+ 43 Kf2 Ng4+ 44 Ke1 Qg3+ 45 Kf1 Nh2+) **41 . . . Nxf3+** White resigns.

Q#9) Instead of resigning, could White have put up any meaningful resistance with 42 Kf2 ?

Answers to Questions

A#1) In both cases *(10 . . . Bg6*, or the game continuation *10 . . . Bg4 11 f3 Bh5 12 g4 Bg6)* White is able to swop off his misplaced knight on h4 to obtain the bishop pair. Hübner's method is preferable. however. By playing 10 . . . Bg4 he provokes White into overextending his K-side pawns; the alternative 10 . . . Bg6 11 Nxg6 grants White a no-risk slight advantage.

A#2) White has attained two of his goals: winning the bishop pair and obtaining a central pawn phalanx. He also enjoys a spacial superiority. Unfortunately, he has had to severely compromise his K - side fortress to achieve this position. Black's game, although a little cramped, is devoid of any static weaknesses. He also has dynamic possibilities for pawn breaks with . . . c5 or . . . e5.

Weighing all of these factors and evaluating them accurately is a task better suited to a chess computer. In our subjective opinion, the position offers approximately equal chances.

A#3) Perhaps you discovered the same plan that Black used in the game Schmidt-Kuligowski (Polish Championship 1981): 16 . . . Bc5! 17 Be3 (the obvious point is that *17 dxc5 Qxc5+ 18 Kh1 Qxc4* wins a pawn for Black) 17 . . . Nxc4 18 Qxc4 Bb6 19 f4 Nd7 20 Nc3

(White has a formidable center, but . . .) 20 . . . e5! (the equalizer!; not *20 . . . c5?!* due to *21 d5!)* 21 fxe5 Nxe5 22 Qe2 Rfd8! with good chances for Black (if *23 dxe5?*, then *23 . . . Qxg5+! 24 Kf2 Qf4+* is too strong).

A#4) 17 a5 cxd4 18 axb6 dxc3 19 Rxa7 Nc6! 20 Rxa8 Rxa8 21 bxc3 Qc5+ 22 Kh1 Bxc3 gives Black the initiative. 17 Na2 is critical; neither 17 . . . a5 18 Nxb4 axb4 19 dxc5 Qxc5+ 20 Be3 Qa5 21 Bb5 nor 17 . . . Ba5 18 dxc5 Qxc5+ 19 Be3 Qe7 20 Rac1 looks comfortable for Black, but 17 . . . Nc6! gives him an excellent game.

A#5) Best is 21 . . . cxb2! 22 Bxb2 *(22 Rxa8? b1=Q!)* 22 . . . Qxg5+ 23 Kh1 Rxa7 24 bxa7 Nc6 25 Bxc4 Qc5 26 Bd5 Qxa7, winning a pawn for Black.

A#6) Black's edge would quickly evaporate after 22 . . . Rxa7?! 23 bxa7 Qc5+ 24 Kh1 Qxa7 25 Bxc4. With 22 . . . Nc6! Black develops a piece with gain of tempo, holds on to his c - pawn, and retains the enemy pawn on b6 as a potential target. In fact, after 22 . . . Nc6! Black emerges with a strategically won game; among other things, he has the better pawn structure and more secure king position.

A#7) White sidesteps . . . Qc5+ and thereby threatens to play Bxc4.

A#8) Black should seize the opportunity for 25 . . . Bd2! (the main point of *24 . . . Rd8!),* with the idea of trading the dark square bishops. Once this plan is carried out, White will be very vulnerable to a dark square assault and his g - pawn will be ripe for plucking. Note that on move 26, Hübner successfully employs this motif.

A#9) White would be too much material down after 42 . . . Rb2 43 Qxb2 Qxh2+ 44 Kxf3 Qxb2. Resignation was justified.

Sunday Night Fever

The drama and tension of a weekend chess tournament reach a peak during the last round, when prize money, trophies, title norms, grand prix points, rating points, and bragging rights are simultaneously at stake.

Few events could boast of a more exciting climax than the 1983 New York Open, an eight-round Swiss played between 31 March - 3 April in New York City, and featuring a then record $100,000 prize fund.

The following is one of the climactic encounters from the top boards.

Miguel Quinteros - Lev Alburt

English Opening

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 Nc3 e6 4 g3

A win is worth almost $4,000; a draw, just a tenth of that amount! So, the situation clearly warrants that both players press hard for victory.

Choice of opening is a very important consideration. Too few amateurs are aware that playing for a win does not necessarily mean venturing risky gambit lines or super-sharp attacks. As the Russian psychologist, GM Nikolai Krogius advises, 'One must not allow one's ambition to win to turn chess into a game of chance'.

Black's main objective in the opening is first to equalize and then to seek sound methods of gaining an advantage. It is quite possible to outplay an opponent from an equal position, so long as dynamic possibilities exist for both sides. To this end, variations to avoid are those which tend to create premature clarification, wholesale exchanges, or symmetrical pawn structures.

4 . . . d5 5 cxd5 Nxd5

A transposition to a Queen's Gambit Tarrasch formation occurs after 5 . . . exd5 6 d4. The text, a speciality of mine, resembles the Queen's Gambit Semi-Tarrasch, and is in fact classified as such by *E.C.O.* and most other sources. However, the line properly belongs in the English Opening family, because from the Queen's Gambit move order 1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nf3 c5 5 cxd5 Nxd5 6 g3 *(instead* of the normal *6 e4* or *6 e3),* Black can equalize rather easily with 6 . . . cxd4! 7 Nxd4 *(7 Nxd5 Qxd5!)* 7 . . . Nxc3 8 bxc3 e5, or 7 . . . Nb4 8 Qa4+ Bd7.

6 Bg2 Nc6 7 O—O Be7 8 d4

The most popular move here, and far more enterprising than the solid but passive 8 d3.

8 . . . O—O

Another possibility for Black is to capture the knight on c3 before castling.

9 Nxd5

White opts to saddle his opponent with an isolated d - pawn. 9 e4!? gives the game a more tactical character, when 9 . . . Nxc3, 9 . . . Ndb4 and 9 . . . Nb6 are plausible responses.

9 . . . exd5

The usual recapture.

Q#1) Can't 9 . . . Qxd5 be played here, in order to avoid weakening Black's pawn structure?

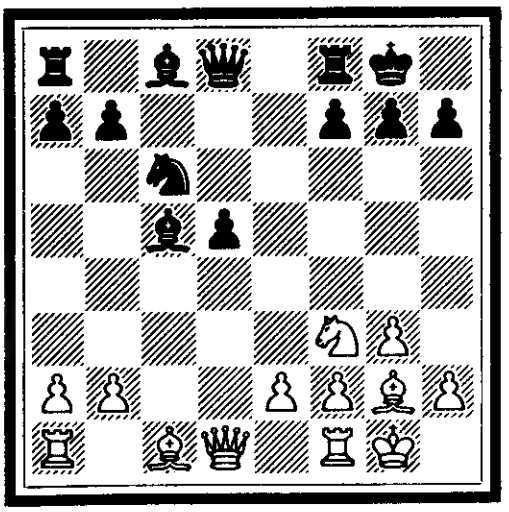
10 dxc5 Bxc5 *(61)*

See next diagram

The position has become more fully clarified, and middlegame strategies will now come into play.

Q#2) Can you evaluate this position in terms of its weak elements and strong elements for both sides? Who stands better and what is the predicted result at this point?

61



11 b3

A logical idea. White intends to fianchetto his other bishop and use it to control the important outpost at d4 and other critical squares on the long diagonal.

Of course, there are several other strategies that White may employ, beginning with such alternative moves as 11 a3, 11 Bg5, 11 Ng5, 11 Ne1, and 11 Qc2.

11 . . . Bf5

Black intends to post this bishop on e4, from where it will neutralize the white counterpart on g2. Another effective plan is 11 . . . Bg4 12 Bb2 d4!, followed by 13 . . . Re8, giving Black sustained pressure on the e - pawn.

12 Bb2 Be4 13 Rc1 Qe7

This protects the bishop, activates the queen, and clears a first rank path for the rooks.

14 Qd2

Current theory recommends 14 Nh4!?, with the idea of exchanging light square bishops and then penetrating Black's virgin K - side. But after 14 . . . Bb6! 15 Bxe4 Qxe4, Black should obtain sufficient counterplay in the center.

14 . . . Bb6

Q#3) Why did Black choose this tame retreat rather than the more natural 14 . . . Rfe8 or 14 . . . Rad8 ?

15 e3

Q#4) What are some of the pros and cons of this move?

15 . . . Rfe8 16 Rfd1 Rad8

With development completed and pieces well posted, Black has every reason to be satisfied with his position.

Q#5) Black also had the option of placing his rooks on c8/d8 instead of d8/e8. Which set-up is preferable?

17 Ba1?!

Obviously, Quinteros is content to retrace the theoretical footsteps of a game he studied in *Informator No. 33* - Ribli-Pinter, Baille Herculane 1982, in which 17 Ba1 made its successful debut. Object-

ively speaking, however, 17 Ba1 wastes a tempo and relinquishes control of a3. Its crude justification is to prepare 18 Qb2 and thus force Black to compromise his position with 18 . . . f6 or 18 . . . . Qf8. The one flaw in White's scheme is that . . . f6 is actually a highly desirable move for Black!

Constructive alternatives are not easy to find here. 17 Nd4 can be met by 17 . . . Bxg2 18 Kxg2 *(18 Nxc6 Qe4!?, threatening 19 . . . Bh3)* 18 . . . Qe4+ 19 Kg1 *(19 f3 Qxe3 20 Nxc6 Qe2+!)* 19 . . . Ne5, with pressure on White's K - side. Another possibility for Black is 17 . . . Ne5 18 f3?! *(18 Qe2! Qf6!? 19 f4!? Nd7 20 Nc6 Qxc6* is unclear) 18 . . . Bxd4! 19 fxe4 *(19 Qxd4 Bxf3!)* 19 . . . Bxb2 20 Qxb2 dxe4.

Perhaps White's best line is 17 Bd4, although in O'Kelly-Palatnik, West Germany 1976, Black gained the initiative after 17 . . . Nxd4 18 Nxd4 h5 19 Qe2 *(19 h4!)* 19 . . . Qe5!

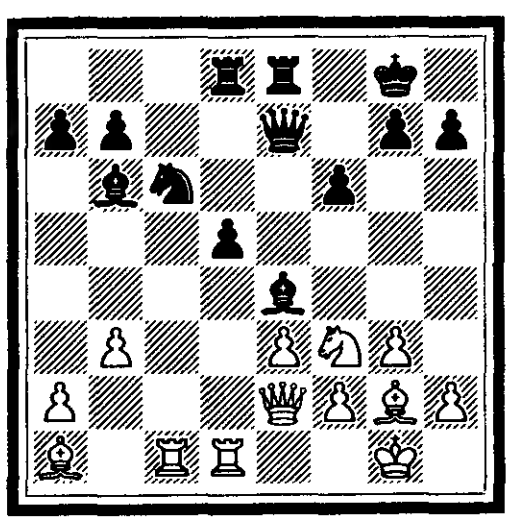
It is quite possible that any improvements for White must be sought at an earlier stage - perhaps as far back as move 11!

17 . . . f6!

Black voluntarily makes the 'weakening' move that 17 Ba1 was designed to provoke! At the slight cost of loosening the black king's fortress, 17 . . . f6 controls the vital e5 and g5 squares and sets up the maneuver . . . Qf7-h5.

18 Qe2 *(62)*

62



18 . . . Kh8!

Black comes up with a theoretical innovation of his own - a mysterious waiting move, in the style of the late World Champion Tigran Petrosian.

In the Ribli-Pinter game, Black tried 18 . . . Qf7, which is not a bad move either. But after 19 Nxd4 Bxd4? 20 Bxd4 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 White stood clearly better and went on to win the endgame. * Better is 19 . . . Ne5! (avoiding exchanges) 20 f3 Bg6, with a difficult, though dynamically balanced struggle ahead.

* Cf. M. I. Shereshevsky's *Endgame Strategy* (Pergamon, 1985) p.116 (Editor's note).

I rejected the pawn-snatching line 18 . . . Qa3 and 19 . . . Nb4, feeling that 19 Nh4! would give White a dangerous K - side attack.

The main purpose of 18 . . . Kh8! is to preserve Black's options for his queen (. . . *Qa3* and . . . *Qf7-h5)* until further play dictates the correct course. The more subtle point is to prepare a subsequent . . . d4 advance without allowing White the time for Qc4+ in some variations.

Of course, . . . Kh8 makes Black more susceptible to back rank mates, and the king is not as well centralized for the endgame. But these are relatively minor drawbacks.

19 Qf1?

After this passive withdrawal, Black is firmly in command (value = 2.5). Instead, if 19 Nd4 Ne5 20 f3 Bg6 21 Kf2, the position remains unclear. But, thanks to 18 . . . Kh8! (instead of Pinter's *18 . . . Qf7),* Black can improve here with 19 . . . Bxg2 20 Kxg2 Qe4+ 21 Qf3 *(21 Kg1? Nxd4 22 Bxd4 Bxd4 23 Rxd4 Qxd4)* 21 . . . Ne5! 22 Qxe4 dxe4, followed by 23 . . . Nd3 and 24 . . . Rc8.

White can possibly maintain the status quo with 19 Bb2, but, psychologically, it was hard for Quinteros to admit the error of his 17th move. He now suffers the consequences.

19 . . . Qa3!

The timing is now perfect for this move.

20 Rd2

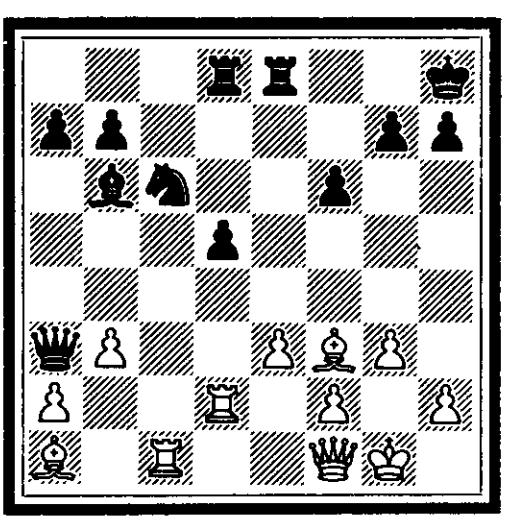
After 20 Qe2 Nb4! Black wins the a - pawn for nothing.

20 . . . Bxf3!

Q#6) Why is Black willingly agreeing to an unforced exchange of pieces - and a bishop for a knight, no less? Can you predict his continuation?

21 Bxf3 *(63)*

63



21 . . . Rxe3!

A stock combination in this kind of position, revealing a further defect of 15 e3.

22 Bxd5

The best try. Of course, after 22 fxe3 Bxe3+ Black recovers his

sacrificed rook with a gain of two pawns. 22 Bb2 Qb4! doesn't help White either.

22 . . . Re7!

Setting a neat trap, into which Quinteros falls. White wins a piece after 22 . . . *Rf3*? 23 Bxc6! Rxd2 24 Bxf3. At first sight 22 . . . Ne7?! is tempting, but 23 fxe3 Bxe3+ 24 Kg2 Bxd2 25 Qxf6!! Rg8 (the only move) 26 Qe5! (26 *Bxg8*? *gxf6*; 26 *Qd4 Nf5*) allows White too many dangerous threats (64).

64

Q#7) How does White answer the moves 2
Ng6, and 26 . . . Bxc1 ?

23 Bb2?

Overlooking Black's reply (value = 0.5) anyway, e.g. 23 Rcd1 (23 *Rdd1 Qxa2*) 23 *h6!*; 24 *Re1 Red7*) 24 . . . Nb4 25 Rd4

23 . . . Qxa2!

An unexpected move. Quinteros repetition of position with 23 . . .

24 Rcd1

Q#8) Why doesn't 24 Ra1

24 . . . Rxd5 25 Rxd5 Qxb2

Hoping for a miracle with

26 . . . Qxf2+ White res

Black, with two piece

pleases.

Moral: Judge not

game's result. (T

17 Ba1?! in Rib

is positionally advantageous for White, while after 10 . . . Qh5 11 dxc5 Bxc5? 12 g4! he wins a piece.

A#2) A typical 'isolani' position has arisen, in which the theoretical and practical winning chances for the two sides are well balanced. On the one hand, Black's isolated d - pawn is a static weakness, assuring White of a structural advantage throughout the middlegame and endgame. But Black has adequate compensation: greater mobility and flexibility for his pieces, spacial superiority, increased central influence (especially if a timely . . . *d5-d4* can be achieved), more advanced central outpost (e4 for Black v. d4 for White), and potential for a rook to dominate the semi-open e - file.

The 'isolani', as the immortal Aron Nimzowitsch dubbed it, represents one of the most important middlegame structures in the whole of chess. The sharpness of the strategic battle limits the possibility of draws, while the complexity of the struggle ensures that the better player will win. (In chapters 4 and 5 we discussed the isolani in greater depth).

Our numerical assessment of this position is 5.0, based on a predicted result of four draws and three wins apiece out of 10 GM games.

A#3) Because White is threatening a decisive fork with 15 Qc3, simultaneously attacking targets at c5 and g7.

A#4) Sooner or later, e2-e3 will become necessary in order to prevent the cramping effects of an eventual . . . d5-d4, and also to secure the vital outpost at d4. On the negative side, 15 e3 weakens the squares d3 and f3, both focal points of Black's forthcoming invasion.

A#5) Black's more centralized deployment of the rooks on d8/e8 is the better choice. In particular, he should avoid placing a rook on c8 because it could trigger some heavy piece swapping along the c - file. Such trades would certainly favor White, as they would simplify his task of exploiting the isolated d - pawn.

In general, the isolani player should make a concerted effort to retain as many pieces on the board as possible. His chances are maximised in the middlegame; his opponent's - in the endgame.

A#6) General principles (two in this case) are meant to be violated occasionally, provided there is a valid reason. Gain of material is usually reason enough. Black's combination begins on his 21st move. Did you foresee all of the variations?

A#7) 26 . . . Nxd5 loses instantly to 27 Qxg7+! Rxg7 28 Rc8+, and 26 . . . Ng6 to 27 Rc8! After 26 . . . Bxc1 27 Bxg8 Bh6 *(27 . . . Qxa2+ 28 Kh3 Bh6 29 Bc4* is decisive for White) 28 Bc4 Ng6 29 Qd5 Qf8 30 Qxb7, White has all the winning chances.

A#8) Yes, but after 24 . . . Rxd5! 25 Rxa2 Rxd2 Black emerges with an absolutely overwhelming position.

10

Discoveries in the Openings

The Benko Gambit

I have often had to find new lines or even create entire new systems in emergency situations when there were only a few days left before the beginning of an important tournament. I have sometimes even had to tackle entire new analyses just hours before an important and decisive game, which could mark a turning point in the tournament. Sometimes this was due to new lines which had developed in the tournament itself, at other times it was due to my discovering a gap or hiatus in the variation I had worked out prior to the tournament. I find that such a desperate development frequently increases the efficiency of my research and stimulates my mental activity to an extraordinary degree.

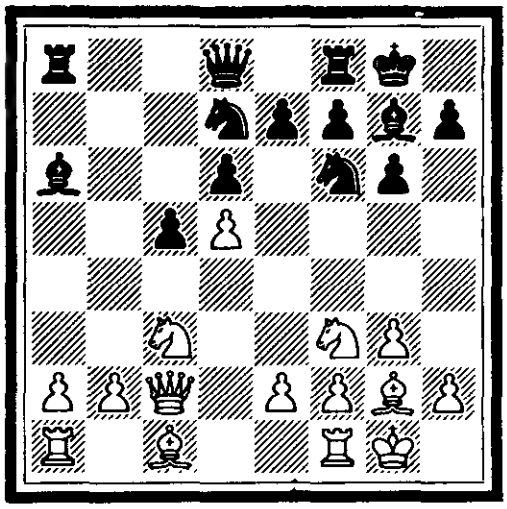
I found myself in such a situation at the end of the USSR Championship 1st League in Odessa, 1974. In the penultimate round I had to play Black against IM Orest Averkin. This tournament meant a great deal to both of us, and we had to make an impressive showing to move into the next highest category of Soviet players.

I began preparing for this important game about a week beforehand, and, of course, I gave special consideration to a game played in the middle of the tournament between Averkin and David Bronstein.

Orest Averkin - David Bronstein

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 Bxa6 6 Nc3 g6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 O—O 10 O—O Nbd7 11 Qc2 *(65)*

65



I was extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity of working with one of the greatest chess geniuses of our time, GM Leonid Stein, who died tragically in 1973 when at the height of his powers. I analyzed with him in great detail this position after Black's 10th move, and his insight was invaluable.

Stein was a leading contender for the World Championship, and much of his preparation was based on the possibility of his becoming a Candidate. He had been planning to use the Benko Gambit, which was only then becoming popular, in the 1973 Brazilian Interzonal.

During our analysis we came to the conclusion that in this position 11 Qc2 creates the greatest problems for Black. Up to this time, however, this line had not been discovered, and the move most usually played was 11 h3, designed of course to prevent the black knight from occupying g4.

Black's objective is to place his queen at a5, attacking the knight on c3 and preventing b2-b3. He would then attempt to place a knight on c4, to attack the pawn at b2 which is supporting the knight on c3, thus inhibiting the development of White's queen's bishop.

Black's objectives are also the same in situations where the light square bishops have been removed from the board. White's objective, of course, is to hinder this deployment of the black pieces and to prevent Black from placing a knight on c4.

When Black is able to place his queen at a5, this also opens up other possibilities and may enable him to open lines on the Q - side with . . . c5-c4 (after White's *b2–b3),* because the queen controls b4, thus preventing b3-b4.

But 11 . . . Qa5 also has some significant disadvantages. It is especially vulnerable if White is able to play his bishop to d2 and if Black follows up with . . . Nb6, blocking the queen's escape route. The queen may then find herself in a precarious position.

Still, all things considered, it seems that Black's best deployment involves placing his knight on b6 and then c4. If White should drive away the knight from c4 by b2-b3, his one-pawn material advantage will be reduced somewhat by tempo and strategic considerations.

The main purpose of 11 Qc2, therefore, is to answer 11 . . . Qa5 with 12 Bd2, leading to sharp variations often involving a sacrifice of the queen, which generally favor White.

In the present game Black first played the simple . . .

11 . . . Qc7 12 Rd1

Unpinning the pawn on e2 and allowing it to defend, if necessary, the d5 pawn.

12 . . . Nb6 13 e4

This now leads to further strategic considerations. For example, if Black is able to play . . . c4 and manages to place a knight on e5, he will be able to exert very strong pressure on the square d3. A better move than 13 e4 was 13 Rb1, to be followed by b2-b3, with the idea of answering . . . c4 with b3-b4 and then a2-a4, with a positional advantage to White.

Now if Black, in attempting to prevent this variation, plays . . . c4, it would in turn permit White to implement another plan: Nd4-c6. Here too the e - pawn is better placed at e2 than at e4, where it will block the diagonal of the bishop at g2.

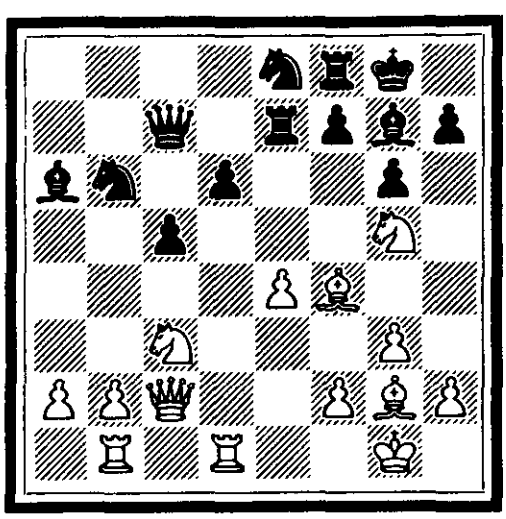
13 . . . Rae8

Here Bronstein has elected to follow a seldom used plan, and is preparing . . . e6.

14 Rb1 e6 15 dxe6 Rxe6 16 Ng5 Re7 17 Bf4 Ne8 *(66)*

Now White has the advantage. For example, 18 b3 is possible, preventing Black from occupying c4 with his knight.

66



18 a4? Bxc3!

Unexpected and very strong.

19 bxc3 Nc4

In the sharp fight that followed, Black won on move 63.

It was clear, however, that White obtained an advantage in the opening, and that the placing of the white queen at c2 on move 11 consolidated this advantage. There could be no doubt that Averkin would be delighted to repeat this move against me.

I had to look for an antidote. The analysis of the position after 11 Qc2 confirmed my opinion that White had a strategic advantage.

Therefore I had to find a way of improving the variation for Black almost from the beginning.

Then I had an inspiration.

Orest Averkin - Lev Alburt

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6

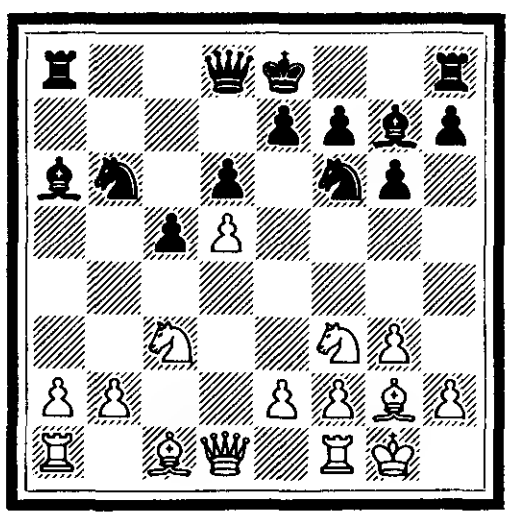
This move isn't the antidote, but was the outcome of my research on the opening moves. The only real benefit I obtained was that it caused my opponent to spend seven or eight minutes considering his reply.

6 Nc3 Bxa6

This is necessary because White is ready to play e2-e4.

7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Nbd7 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 O—O Nb6! *(67)*

67



Here I would like to make some general comments about the Benko Gambit and to pay a compliment to its salient features and advantages.

By sacrificing a pawn on the fourth move, Black obtains a significant advantage in development and opens important lines for his pieces, both diagonally and vertically. He is also able to achieve a solid pawn structure with one 'continent' as opposed to the two 'islands' that represent White's pawn structure (this nomenclature is borrowed from Capablanca).

This superior pawn structure itself almost equals the pawn sacrifice that Black has made and, if his other advantages are dissipated, the greater solidity of his pawn structure gives him a solid position to fall back on defensively.

Even if Black does not make the best moves in the opening and plays a passive middlegame, with exact defense he has good drawing chances. The real risks to Black's position usually materialize when this course of playing for a draw is not sufficient.

The Benko Gambit does not really require the intense, exact and deep knowledge that is required, for example, in the Grünfeld,

Alekhine or Sicilian Defenses. In these openings the most important factor is to find the best positions for the pieces and to appraise the consequences of any minor and subtle chances in move order or in the placing of some of the pieces.

With the Benko Gambit, understanding its underlying values and strategic considerations is much more important than memorizing a series of moves or preconceived variations. For many years I have played (from both sides of the board) these positions involving the sacrifice of the black a - pawn. I have written articles and booklets and analyzed these structures as they appear in the King's Indian Defense (e.g. Taimanov-Bronstein, as found in Bronstein's book on the 1953 Zurich Candidates Tournament).

Frequently these positions stem from the Czech Benoni (although this is usually a little worse for Black, since his dark square bishop does not have the important a1-h8 diagonal). One of the first games which incorporated this idea was played by Capablanca, who had the black pieces in a Ruy Lopez and sacrificed his a - pawn. I always had the feeling that this opening was not exactly correct, but as an innovation it broke important ground and developed a unique approach that was the forerunner of the Benko Gambit.

I became intrigued by the Benko Gambit shortly after reading an excellent article by Walter Browne in *Chess Life & Review* with three carefully annotated games. From this I realized that the main idea, which is strange and unique in situations involving a sacrifice, is that the endgames are generally better for Black, and this converted me into a staunch supporter of this type of configuration when playing the black pieces.

In the Benko Gambit, tactics almost always take a secondary role, and moves made early in the opening such as . . . O—O and . . . Rfb8 are almost always made automatically. But there are no rules without exceptions, and Black has been forced to adopt some effective but non-standard approaches to counter deployments of the white pieces which could create serious problems for Black's plan.

The main idea of 10 . . . Nb6 is to prevent White from playing 11 Qc2 etc. On the negative side, it prevents the black queen from developing at a5.

11 Re1

This came after half an hour's thought. It prepares for the defense of the d5 pawn by e2-e4, should it become necessary.

11 . . . O—O

This is the correct time to castle, because the best position for White's rook is actually d1, and not e1.

12 Nd2 Qc7

This is a useful developing move and it opens the way for the rook

on f8 to move to b8.

13 Nf1 Ng4

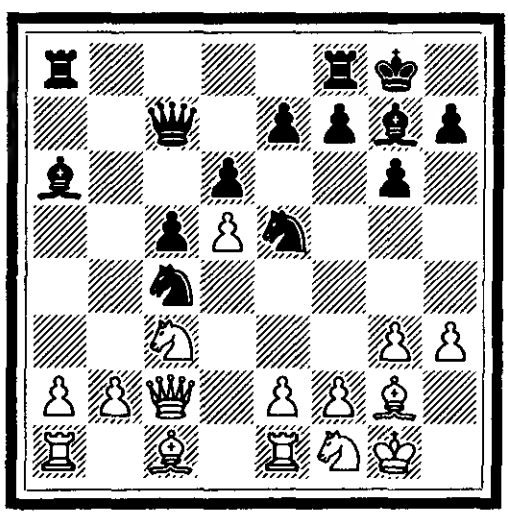
White's knight move has unblocked his queen's bishop, but has removed the important influence it was exerting on c4, where Black will now try to place his knight from b6.

However, Black must guard against the possible exchange of this knight, and so he first transfers his other knight to e5. Note also that Black's 12 . . . Qc7 prepared the way (in many variations) for him to attack the d5 pawn (by placing the queen on b7), with the idea of provoking the weakening move e2-e4.

13 Rb1 can be met by 13 . . . Qb7, with the interesting idea of sacrificing the queen - an idea that was not realized for another 2½ years (cf. the following game Hort-Alburt).

14 Qc2 Nc4 15 h3 Nge5 *(68)*

68



Black has managed to achieve an ideal arrangement, and now has a clear advantage; after 16 b3 Qa5! (finally) White would lose material. It is also dangerous for him to play 16 f4 Nd7 17 Nd2, because of 17 . . . Ne3 or first 17 . . . Bd4+ and 18 . . . Ne3. In the event of 16 Nd2 Qa5! 17 Nxc4 Nxc4 18 Bd2 (White doesn't have time to exchange the knight on c4 with his light square bishop - if *18 e4 Rfb8,* and there is no good defense against . . . *Nxb2)* 18 . . . Rfb8 Black at least regains the sacrificed pawn and keeps a positional advantage.

16 Rd1 Qa5 17 a3

Creating a new weakness at b3.

17 . . . Rfb8

Here these natural moves - . . . Qa5, . . . Rfb8 - are also the best.

18 Ra2

Unnatural, but what else is there?

18 . . . Qb6

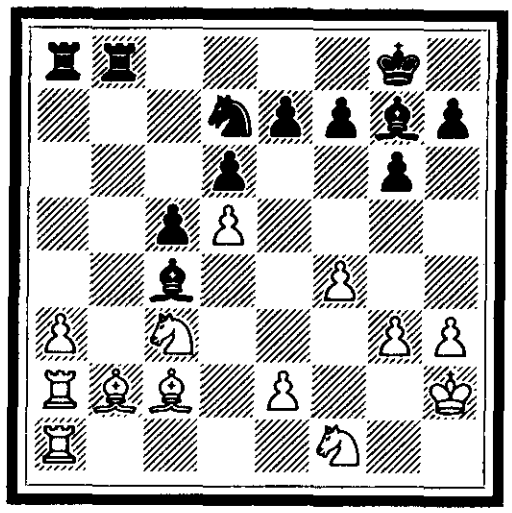
The typical approach for Black in the Benko Gambit, in order to achieve a superior ending.

19 f4 Nd7 20 Kh2

White loses time here, and better was 20 Be4, with a hard fight for a draw.

20 . . . Qb3 21 Be4 (too late) **21 . . . Qxc2 22 Bxc2 Nxb2** (a typical blow) **23 Bxb2 Bc4! 24 Rda1** *(69)*

69



24 . . . Rxb2! 25 Rxb2 Bxc3 26 Rb7 Bxa1 27 Rxd7 Bxe2

The position is won for Black, but he still has to play exactly.

28 Nd2 Rxa3 29 Rxe7 Ra2 30 Rxe2 Rxc2 31 Kh1

This loses immediately, whereas 31 Kg1 would have prolonged the defense, but White, a pawn down, has no drawing chances in this ending.

31 . . . Kg7 32 Rg2 c4 33 Nb1 Rxg2 34 Kxg2 Bb2 White resigns.

When I analyzed the game afterwards with Averkin and my other colleagues, the possibility of a queen sacrifice in this type of position became apparent, and two years later I made an intensive effort to remember this analysis during the following game.

Vlastimil Hort - Lev Alburt

Czech Open, Decin 1977

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 Nf3 d6 8 g3 Bg7 9 Bg2 Nbd7 10 O—O Nb6

After the game Hort told me that he had played 14 games against the Benko Gambit, and had won them all. His technique was to strive for the exchange of the light-square bishops. My 10 . . . Nb6 made him think for some 10-15 minutes, but probably did not change his opinion that White has an advantage.

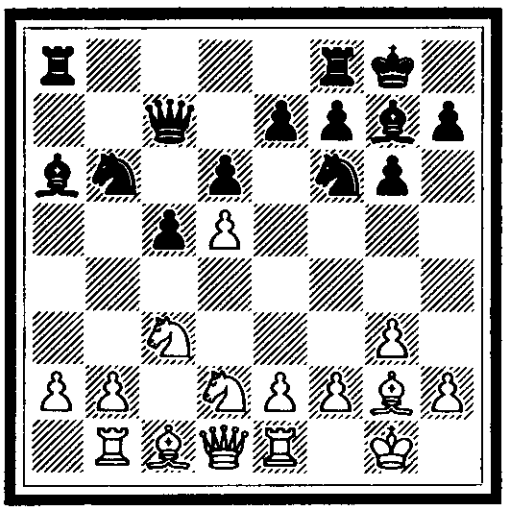
11 Re1 O—O

Following a well-established path.

12 Nd2 Qc7

This is not the only move available to Black and may not even be the best, but I wanted to use my past experience.

70



This was the major point of divergence from the previous game. After 10 minutes' thought, I played:

13 . . . Qb7

13 . . . Ng4 was also a possibility and would have served to counter White's planned b2-b3, with the further idea of forcing White (after . . . *Bd4*) to create a weakness by e2-e3.

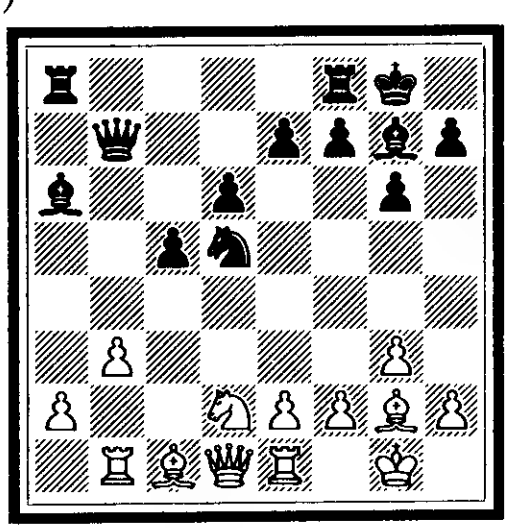
14 b3 Nfxd5

Had I not had the courage to take this pawn, my 13th move would have been pointless. But I had to calculate and evaluate all the variations and positions, including a possible queen sacrifice.

I was also convinced that White could not avoid returning the pawn; 14 e4, the only move to save it, creates too many weaknesses and gives Black too many tempi if, for example, he plays . . . Bd3. To keep the pawn, White would have to pay too high a price.

15 Nxd5 Nxd5 *(71)*

71



16 Nf1?!

White's only chances in this position lie along the h1-a8 diagonal. If Black can neutralize the bishop on g2, for example, with a series of moves such as . . . Bb5-c6, or after White's a2-a4 with . . . Rad8, . . . Qa8 and . . . Bb7, he would have a clear advantage because of his better pawn structure and other typical Benko Gambit advantages.

With his 16th move White was hoping to win a pawn, but the possibilities open to Black through a potential queen sacrifice make his advantage a sure one. Actually, White should have played 16 Ne4, hoping in the ensuing complications to find equalizing chances. Then 16 . . . e6 is bad:

(a) 17 Nxd6 Qe7! 18 Bxd5 exd5 19 Qxd5 Rad8 *(19 . . . Rfd8* is also interesting), leading to complicated positions: 20 Bf4 (or *20 Rd1 Bd4)* 20 . . . g5 21 Nf5 (after *21 Bxg5* the three pawns for the bishop are not enough for equality, and *21 Qxg5 Qxg5 22 Bxg5 Rxd6 23 Be7 Rd2* is also a little better for Black) 21 . . . Qf6 22 Bd6, and White seems to stand better, although this is not completely clear.

(b) 17 Bf4!, when Black's best chance appears to lie in the sacrifice of his queen: 17 . . . Nxf4 *(if 17 . . . Rfd8 18 Bxd6)* 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 Bxb7, when he has to fight for a draw. Very important are the weaknesses in Black's pawn structure after he plays . . . e6: it is much easier to defend the pawn on e7.

Consequently, it is much better for Black to play 16 . . . Rad8, which immediately defends against three threats: Nxd6, Nxc5 and Nf6+, winning the exchange. He is then ready to play . . . Qa8 and . . . Bb7, so White has to play 17 Bf4, renewing the threat of Nxd6.

It is instructive to analyze the situation after the sacrifice of the queen: 17 . . . Nxf4 18 Nf6+ Bxf6 19 Bxb7 Nxe2+ and 20 . . . Bxb7. Black has two bishops and a pawn for the queen - normally insufficient, but here his chances are better because of his superior pawn structure. At any rate, Black is not in danger of losing. But 17 . . . Qa8 also seems to be very strong: 18 Nxd6 Bb7!, with a surfeit of binds and pins! After 19 Nxb7 Nxf4 White has to sacrifice his queen *(20 Nxd8 Qxg2* mate), and will have a hard fight to draw.

Let us return to the position in the last diagram. It is clear that 16 Nc4 is bad because of the pin; the simple 16 . . . Bxc4 is fatal. In playing 16 Nf1 Hort was hoping that Black would play the 'normal' 16 . . . e6. Then comes 17 Ne3 Nxe3 (here it is too late to sacrifice the queen; after *17 . . . Nc3 18 Bxb7* White has the advantage in all variations because of the weakness of the pawn at d6) 18 Bxe3, and Black has to chose which pawn he wants to lose, e.g. 18 . . . d5 19 Bxc5, when he has a hard and probably unsuccessful fight for a draw. But fortunately Black had realized this when he made his 13th move.

16 . . . Nc3 17 Bxb7 Bxb7!

After 17 . . . Nxd1 18 Bxa6 *(18 Bxa8? Nc3)* 18 . . . Nc3 19 Bd3 White has the advantage.

18 Qd3?!

As will soon become apparent, White would have had better defensive chances with 18 Qd2 Nxb1 19 Qe3.

18 . . . Be4 19 Qe3 Bd4 20 Qh6 Bxb1

Because of White's 18th move, Black has been able to centralize

his pieces. Now he has the option of capturing the rook with his bishop and retaining his knight on a dominant and more effective post than at b1.

21 a3

White seeks to exchange his two weak pawns for the strong pawn on c5.

21 . . . Ba2

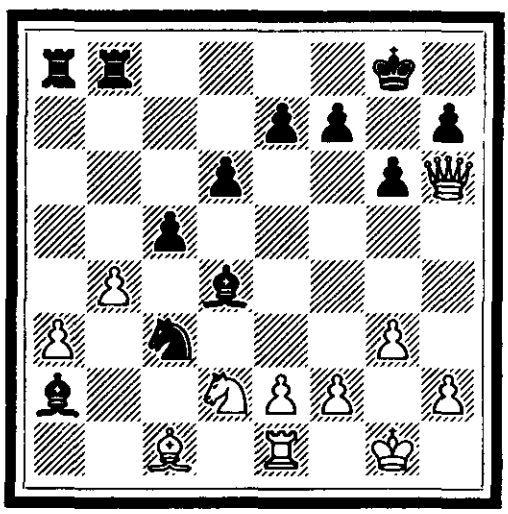
I found it difficult to select between two very similar and perhaps equivalent moves, . . . Ba2 and . . . Bc2, and I thought about this for almost 20 minutes. I knew that my position was much better and that I probably had a win, which I didn't want to jeopardize.

22 Nd2

This is insufficient, but what can White do?

22 . . . Rfb8 23 b4 *(72)*

72



When he made this move, Hort offered a draw. Professionally, this was the right moment, because I had to select from three different moves. The fourth option, to accept the draw, was not realistic, but sometimes an opponent can be lulled into a trap; if he is offered a draw and refuses, he may then seize upon one of the less desirable alternatives available to him and he may make a move which has aggressive characteristics but may not be the most sound under the circumstances.

Here, for example, I could play 23 . . . c4, retaining this dangerous and passed pawn. But in this case my bishop at a2 would be out of the game for a long time and White would have opportunities of attacking my king, with perhaps some distant hope of giving perpetual check or drawing by constantly attacking pawns and pieces.

Or I could first retreat my bishop to e6, still retaining my c - pawn but with a weakened pawn structure after 24 bxc5. And here the pawn structure is of the utmost importance, because it limits the activity of the white queen. Hence I decided on the modest . . .

23 . . . cxb4 24 axb4 Rxb4

Material is almost equal now, with White perhaps the equivalent of half a pawn ahead. There are no weaknesses and no passed

pawns. But Black has a clear and significant advantage; the white pieces are passive and will remain so for quite a long time. The most handicapped is the white queen, which cannot be used effectively and which is in constant danger.

25 Nf3 Bg7 26 Qh3

If 26 Qe3 Re4 27 Qd2 Bc4, with the winning threat of 28 . . . Ra2, or 26 Qd2 Bc4 with the same threat, when White's position is hopeless. Also, 26 Qg5, gaining a tempo by the attack on the e7 pawn, is no better, because after 26 . . . Re4, attacking the e2 pawn and protecting the e7 pawn, White is forced to play 27 Be3 or 27 e3, and then the simple 27 . . . h6 or the equally effective 27 . . . f6 spells disaster. This is a rare case of a queen having apparently free play in the middle of the board, but with all the squares ostensibly available to it controlled by the opponent's pieces and pawns.

Now the queen has been forced into a very unpleasant position.

26 . . . Be6 27 Qf1

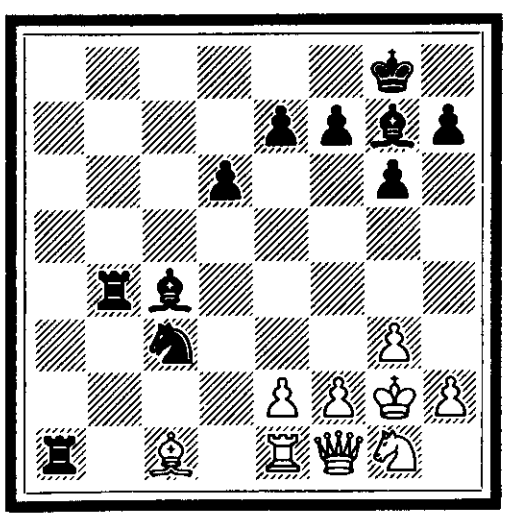
Protecting the pawn on e2.

27 . . . Bc4 28 Kg2

Preparing to protect the e2 pawn with the knight.

28 . . . Ra1 29 Ng1 *(73)*

73



A totally unreal situation: the queen has no legal move and is completely surrounded by its own pieces. This was the point of Black's strategy (cf. the previous diagram).

Also, the other white pieces are poorly placed, especially when compared with the mobility of the black pieces. Now it is not difficult for Black to find a clear win.

29 . . . Rbb1 30 Kh3

To make space for the queen! However, it is abundantly clear that such moves are made from desperation and helplessness, and cannot really save the game.

30 . . . h5

To answer 31 Qg2 with 31 . . . Be6+ 32 Kh4 Rxc1 and 33 . . . Bf6+.

31 f4

This makes space, but at the same time creates a decisive weakness.

31 . . . Be6+ 32 Kg2 Nd5

With the threat of 33 . . . Rxc1 and 34 . . . Ne3+.

33 Kf3 Bc3 34 Rd1 Bb2 White resigns.

My maneuver 9 . . . Nbd7 and 10 . . . Nb6 soon became the main line against White's fianchetto system, and made the latter much less attractive for White. Then, a new 'dragon' emerged . . .

★ ★ ★

In recent years 5 e3 has been considered a proven (and the only) way for White to achieve an edge against the Benko Gambit (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6). Both in the 'quiet' lines (5 . . . axb5 6 Bxb5 Ba6 and 5 . . . g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 d6) and the sharp lines (5 . . . g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 O—O 8 Nf3 e6) there has been no clear way for Black to achieve equality.

In my game against IM Maxim Dlugy in the 1984 New York International, I tried the new idea of combating 5 e3 with 5 . . . e6 6 Nc3 Qa5 7 Bd2 Qb6. The point of this time-losing maneuver is that White's d - pawn is now under-protected. White should take on e6, entering the territory of the Blumenfeld Counter-gambit, where Black's strong center, good bishops, and pressure along the f-file give him full compensation for the pawn. But after 8 dxe6 fxe6 9 a4 axb5 10 axb5! the position is very sharp and unclear. Max soon outplayed me, winning a very good game.

Later, still not completely satisfied with the positions after 9 . . . axb5, I decided to improve on Black's play. My basic idea was that, by playing 5 e3, White has left the pawn on d5 under-protected, which is underlined by the . . . Qa5-b6 maneuver, luring the white bishop to d2. I worked on this variation with my friend and frequent co-author, Jeff Kastner, and my friend and chess student Jim Burke, owner of the Barclay Gallery (sponsor of the Barclay Gallery International in New York that year). Our joint efforts helped me defeat a very strong opponent, the then World Open Champion Joel Benjamin.

Joel Benjamin - Lev Alburt

U.S.A. Championship 1984

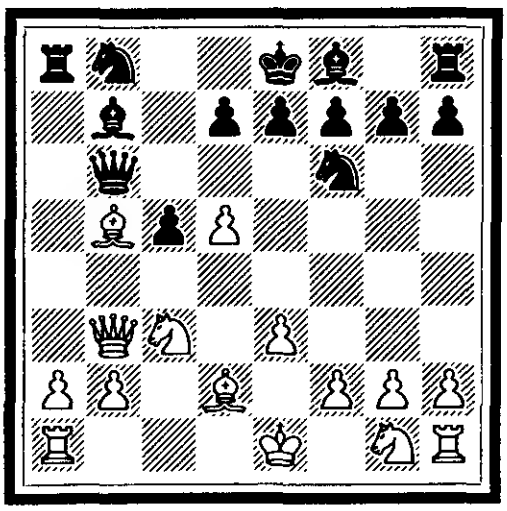
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 Bb7 6 Nc3 Qa5 7 Bd2 axb5 8 Bxb5

After 8 Nxb5 Qb6, White cannot protect his d - pawn.

8 . . . Qb6 9 Qb3 *(74)*

Of course, on 9 Bc4 Black doesn't play 9 . . . Qxb2 10 Rb1, but 9 . . . e6!, e.g. 10 e4 Nxe4.

74



9 . . . e6!

The Barclay Gallery Variation! At the World Open earlier that year, against Hungarian GM Ivan Farago I played 9 . . . Na6 10 Nf3 Nb4 11 O—O Bxd5, but soon found myself in a much worse ending.

10 e4

Perhaps 10 Bc4 is safer and better. Of course, not 10 dxe6 Bxg2. White's weakness on g2 illustrates the importance of the early development of Black's bishop on b7.

10 . . . Nxe4! 11 Nxe4 Bxd5 12 Qd3 f5

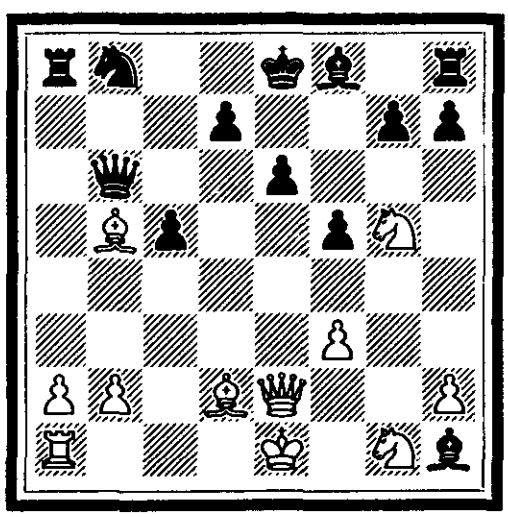
Here White's best try is 13 Ng3, obtaining two pieces for a rook and two pawns. The position is very sharp and unbalanced, and despite the fact that it looks preferable for Black, the real game is still ahead. Benjamin, however, chooses a sharper but inferior move. Incidentally, by this time he had spent more than an hour and a half on his clock, not surprising when faced with such an innovation.

13 Ng5?! Bxg2 14 Qe2

Other moves also promise White no real compensation.

14 . . . Bxh1 15 f3 *(75)*

75



Cutting off the bishop, with some hopes of winning it later. The immediate 15 Nxe6 does not work because of 15 . . . Be4. Now, however, 16 Nxe6 is a serious threat. Here I thought for about 25 minutes before finding the only move, a difficult one but nevertheless good. The attractive 15 . . . c4 fails to 16 Qxe6+! Qxe6 17 Nxe6, when White even stands better. Other variations such as 15 . . . Nc6 16 Nxe6 and 15 . . . Be7 16 Nxe6, giving up the e6 pawn, also didn't satisfy me. And although 15 . . . Ke7 looks to be the only way of avoiding material loss and preserving Black's good pawn structure, he risks staying too far behind in development. After thinking for about 10 minutes I conceived the idea of the exchange sacrifice that would keep all my pawns alive. And the more I checked and double-checked this sacrifice, the more I liked it.

15 . . . Ra6!!

Certainly, White may take on a6, but after even 16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 Qxa6 Nxa6 the best he can dream of achieving is to have a knight for three pawns - and those strong, connected, central pawns would be superior. However, even this is not possible. The bishop on h1 is not going to be lost, and the price Black would pay for its freedom is the g-pawn (by pushing it to g4), leaving him with an extra pawn. And 16 . . . Nxa6 promises White even less. Can White try to knock the props from under the rook by attacking the knight at b8? No, because 16 Bf4 loses to 16 . . . c4! That is why Benjamin first protects his bishop.

16 a4 Be7 17 N1h3

After 17 Bf4 O—O 18 Bxb8 Bxg5 19 Bxa6 Rxb8 Black has two extra pawns and good chances of winning another (on b2). His bishop on h1 is not very safe, but White's king is not exactly cozy either.

17 . . . h6 18 a5

White, whose knight on g5 does not now have any retreat square, pins his hopes on this move. Black could have sacrificed his queen for a lot of material, but the move I chose is the easiest way to victory.

18 . . . Qb7! 19 Nxe6 Rxe6 20 Qxe6 Qxb5

The rest is simple and requires no commentary.

21 Qe2 Qxb2 22 Rd1 Nc6 23 Kf2 Qd4+ 24 Be3 Qh4+ 25 Kg1 Qxh3 26 Kxh1 Nxa5 27 Bxc5 Nc6 28 Bxe7 Nxe7 29 Rg1 Kf7 30 Rxg7+ Kxg7

White resigns.

In his *New York Times* column, Robert Byrne called Benjamin's rook sacrifice a bluff. I would rather call it desperation in time pressure. After making his 30th move, Benjamin saw immediately that there was no perpetual ckeck, and resigned after I took the rook.

★ ★ ★

And now a game which demonstrates another major line of the Benko Gambit.

Johann Hjartarson - Lev Alburt

Nordic Countries v U.S.A., 1986

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5

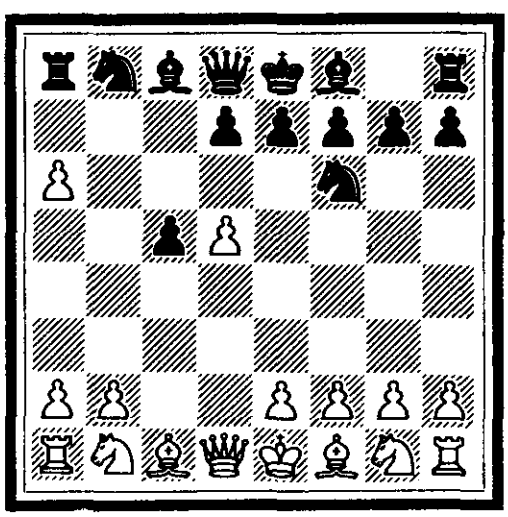
Black sacrifices a pawn - for faster development, the initiative, and some long-lasting positional advantages which we will discuss later. White can of course decline the gambit, at least temporarily, by 4 Nf3, 4 Qc2, 4 f3 or 4 a4. All these moves are playable, but none of them promises White more than approximate equality (or at best a slight 'opening' advantage), but then neither does the text move.

4 . . . a6

Black's idea is to open the f1-a6 diagonal for his bishop and the a- and b-files for his rooks.

5 bxa6 *(76)*

76



Other good moves for White are 5 e3 (see the earlier Benjamin-Alburt game), 5 b6 (an idea of Roman Dzindzikhashvili) and 5 Nc3.

5 . . . g6

Why not 5 . . . Bxa6 ? In fact, 5 . . . Bxa6 is a good move, and usually leads to the same positions as 5 . . . g6. The reason why I (or 'theory') suggest 5 . . . g6 here is as follows: if White plays a rare system with the fianchetto of both his bishops (in this case the queen's knight does not go to c3, in order not to block the bishop on b2) Black's most efficient reply is to capture on a6 with his knight rather than his bishop, in order to play a later . . . Nb4 with a double attack on the a2 and d5 pawns. This subtlety, however, is of no real importance, because Black has a good (equal) game even with his bishop (and not his knight) on a6.

6 Nc3 Bxa6

Now this capture is a must, otherwise White would play e2-e4 with a clear advantage. After 6 . . . Bxa6 White has a choice: to play e2-e4 (as in the game) and to lose some tempi on artificial castling, or to fianchetto his light-square bishop, as in the games Averkin-Alburt

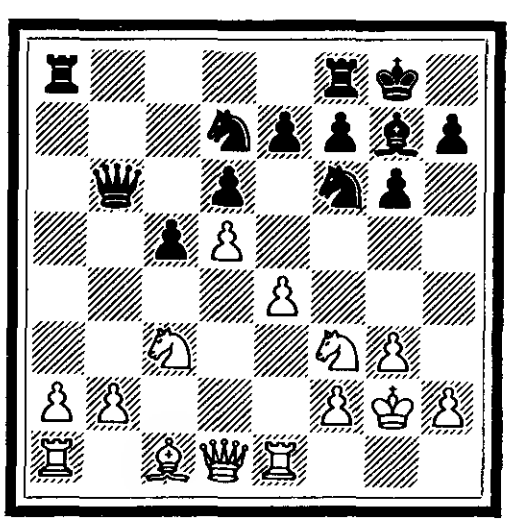
and Hort-Alburt. White could, of course, have played 6 e3, but this loses at least one tempo, as he would eventually have to play e3-e4 - Black simply completes his development by 6 . . . Bg7 and 7 . . . O—O, as he doesn't now have to worry about the otherwise possible e4-e5. Black will play . . . Qb6 and only then take on a6 with his bishop, in order (after *Bxa6* by White) to recapture on a6 with his queen, and he plays . . . Bxa6 only after the white bishop moves (thereby gaining another tempo). The latter is easy to achieve, as Black has more useful moves than White that he can make before taking on a6, e.g. . . . d6 and . . . Nbd7.

7 Nf3 d6 8 e4 Bxf1 9 Kxf1 Bg7 10 g3

On his 10th move White has to choose between faster development and a safer position for his king. He has decided in favor of the former, and plans to put his king on g2, where, however, it sometimes allows Black counterplay along the h1-a8 diagonal; also, if White ever plays f2-f3 in order to protect his e4 pawn, his king on the second rank becomes exposed. Therefore White often plays 10 h3 here, especially as this is a good move anyway (it prevents a black knight from using the g4 square), and then his king goes to h2. But this maneuver takes three moves (one more than *10 g3 and 11 Kg2),* and Black can use this extra tempo. Current theory considers these two variations *(10 h3* and *10 g3)* as equivalent; the evaluation of this position should be [5.0] or at most [5.3], something slightly below a normal opening advantage for White. In fact, which side you like to play here is very subjective, purely a matter of taste; I, for instance, prefer Black.

10 . . . O—O 11 Kg2 Nbd7 (11 . . . Na6 is also good here) **12 Re1 Qb6** *(77)*

77



We have reached a classic position of the Benko Gambit, popular 10-15 years ago and now back in tournament practice after other, more ambitious White systems have been proved not dangerous for Black. Black is a pawn down, but he has the following **long-lasting** factors as compensation: pressure on the a- and b-files, where his

rooks cooperate effectively with his bishop at g7; control over two important diagonals (by the bishop and the queen on a6, which is where it goes), and, most importantly, a superior pawn structure, as all the black pawns are connected in one huge 'continent', whereas White has one smaller 'continent' and one small and vulnerable 'island' (a2 and b2).

In the early 1970s White usually played 13 Qe2 here - until it was discovered that, paradoxically, Black could (and should) offer the exchange of queens by 13 . . . Qa6. Paradoxically, because usually a side which has sacrificed material tries to attack (and consequently, to avoid exchanges, especially the exchange of queens). But there are exceptions; here, incidentally, it is possible to explain in very logical terms why the exchange of queens is beneficial for Black.

Black is going to play on the Q - side, and in some variations this may leave his K - side vulnerable. Indeed, along with a breakthrough in the center, an attack on the black king is one of White's best options in the Benko, and it is much more promising than the hope of eventually using his extra pawn in some unspecified remote ending. And without the queens, this threat, this option (an attack) is taken away from White; moreover, in an ending Black can often play . . . f5, attacking the white center, a plan which is very double-edged and risky with the queens still on the board.

Those who - like Walter Browne and myself - first discovered that Black is equal or better in various Benko endings, and that he should strive for them rather than avoid them, scored pretty well with Black in the early seventies, until this 'paradox' became common knowledge, and players with White at least stopped regarding typical endings in the Benko Gambit as favorable, and began looking for safety first, rather than feeling obliged to seek an (illusory) advantage.

Incidentally, the Benko Gambit is an excellent illustration of how openings should be studied - in close connection not only with the middlegame, but also the endgame. 'What am I trying to achieve?' - this was the question I asked myself when preparing to play the Benko Gambit. 'Is a draw everything I want and can possibly achieve?' And only when I found out, after much analysis, that Black has good chances of a win even after exchanging his c-pawn for White's a- and b-pawns - something which will be discussed later - then and only then did I decide that this was an opening I could use as my main weapon, not only on the rare occasions when a draw was desirable.

13 Re2

White protects his b-pawn and prepares to develop his bishop.

13 . . . Rfb8 14 h3 Qa6

Putting pressure on the white rook. **Now** this rook is well protected, but just wait for a few moves. Besides, Black plans to maneuver his

knight to c4 via b6; were it not for 14 h3, another maneuver, . . . Nf6-g4-e5-d3 (or even . . . *Qd3*) would also be possible.

15 Bg5

Preventing the knight on f6 from leaving this square. Here I thought for nearly 10 minutes over my reply.

15 . . . h6

This move creates a comfortable post for my king at h7, but it also weakens the king's pawn screen, which is an important factor in the middlegame; also, in some variations the h6 pawn remains unprotected. Still, this was the best move.

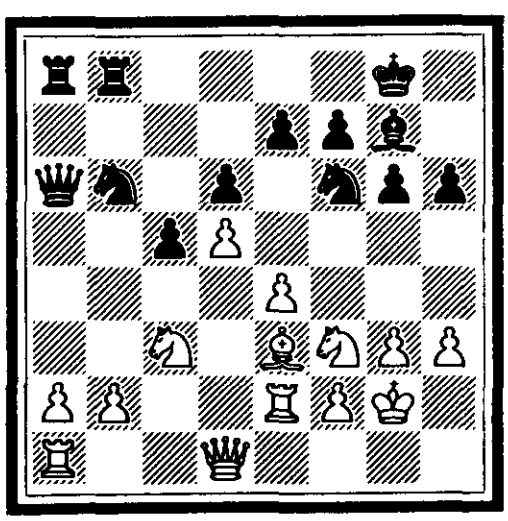
16 Be3

16 Bf4 would allow Black, at an appropriate moment, to open the diagonal for his bishop with gain of tempo (. . . *Nh5*), and also, in some (not very likely) circumstances the further bishop hunt . . . g5 could be possible.

After the move in the game White stands clearly worse - [4.0] at best. So, both 16 Bf4 and even 16 Bc1 should be analyzed, but without any real hopes of equality (to say nothing of an advantage) for White. Thus 15 Bg5 looks like an error, but without it Black can play with impunity 15 . . . Ne8 followed by 16 . . . Nc7 and 17 . . . Nb5, with a very comfortable game. Does this mean that the whole system chosen by White is toothless and does not promise him anything more than possible equality? - It might.

16 . . . Nb6 *(78)*

78



This thematic move is possible only because the white rook on e2 is insufficiently defended: 17 e5 is refuted by 17 . . . Nfxd5.

17 Rc1

Why not 17 b3, depriving the black knight of the important c4 square? First, I saw (before playing *16 . . . Nb6)* that after 17 . . . Nxe4 18 Nxe4 Bxa1 19 Qxa1 Qxe2 20 Bxh6 f6 21 Nxf6+! exf6 22 Qxf6 (all these moves are forced) 22 . . . Ra7 (or *22 . . . Rb7)* White should (and could) draw by perpetual check. I continued my search, as I believed that Black should have more than a draw here, and because I didn't want to reject such an otherwise nice move as 16 . . . Nb6, and

eventually I found the winning move - 17 . . . Nfxd5! Now after 18 Nxd5 (other lines are also very much in Black's favor) 18 . . . Nxd5 19 exd5 Bxa1 20 Qxa1 Qxe2 21 Bxh6 f6 we obtain a position similar to the one reached after White's 20th move in the previous variation, the only difference being that there is no white knight at e4 (and no black knight at b6). And this difference is vital, as White cannot now open up the black king by sacrificing his e4 knight on f6, and he should lose, indeed he should resign.

17 . . . Nc4!

This is stronger than 17 . . . Na4, which allows White to equalize after 18 Nxa4 Qxa4 19 Qxa4 Rxa4 20 e5. But in order to be certain that Black was better, I had to foresee and evaluate correctly the position six moves ahead, after 23 . . . Nc5 (as in the game).

18 b3 Nxe3 19 Rxe3 Nd7

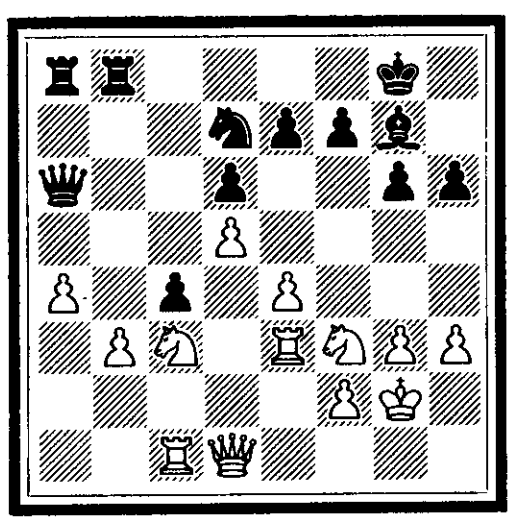
Opening the diagonal for the bishop. Note that, were it not for the black pawn on h6, 19 . . . Bh6 would have won.

20 a4

White is ready to block the Q - side by 21 Nb5 followed by 22 Nd2. Black's reply is a must.

20 . . . c4! *(79)*

79



21 Nb5

This looks very attractive because of the double threat: to recapture on c4 with the rook and to win the exchange after Nc7.

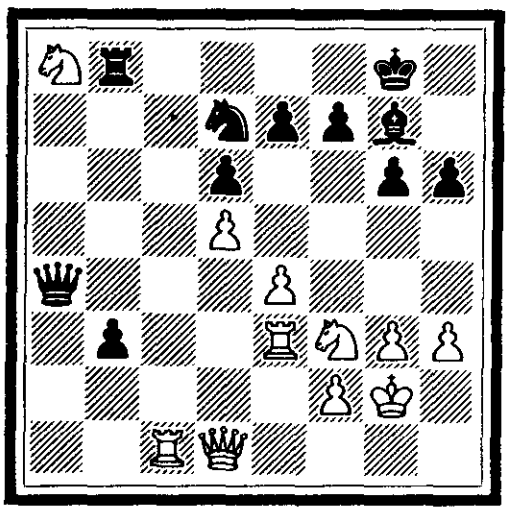
Another possible move was 21 bxc4, which leads to a substantial positional advantage for Black. He would eventually win the a-pawn and exert strong pressure on the e-pawn; besides, the white king is not as safe as Black's. But the various endings - virtually all of them - also do not promise White much hope of an early draw here. As mentioned above, I have analyzed these types of endings, with a 5 v. 5 pawn structure, in great detail - as far as rook v. rook endings, and sometimes even as far as pawn endings, and I have discovered that Black often has good winning chances. Usually, the more pieces left on the board, the more difficult the job facing White. On my

scale I would evaluate the position after 21 bxc4 as [2.5], with a predicted result of 5 wins for Black and 5 draws out of ten games.

White's 21st move 21 Nb5 changes this evaluation further in Black's favor: [2.0], but with a sharper distribution of possible results: seven wins for Black, two draws, but also - one win for White.

21 . . . cxb3! 22 Nc7 Qxa4 23 Nxa8 *(80)*

80



23 . . . Nc5

Another alternative, which I considered before making my 17th move as well as after White's 23rd, was 23 . . . b2. At first I thought that after 24 Qxa4 bxc1=Q 25 Qxd7 Rxa8 26 Qxe7 Ra2 (threatening to take the white rook) 27 Re1 Qc2 28 Rf1 Black could play for a win without any risk of losing. Still, I thought that my winning chances here would be poorer than after another move planned in advance, 23 . . . Nc5. Then, however, I found that **White** could obtain better chances after 23 . . . b2? by 24 Rc8+! Rxc8 25 Qxa4 b1=Q 26 Qxd7 Rxa8 27 Qxe7. The difference compared with the previous variation is that the black queen is at b1 instead of c1, and because of this 27 . . . Ra2 does not gain a tempo.

After this discovery I checked again my pre-planned 23 . . . Nc5, and made it with great confidence.

Now . . . b2 is a serious threat, and thus 24 Nc7 does not promise White anything. But otherwise Black threatens to capture the knight on a8, and with a pawn - but what a pawn - for the exchange, he should win the game without great trouble. White found the best reply.

24 Rxc5! dxc5 25 Nc7 c4!

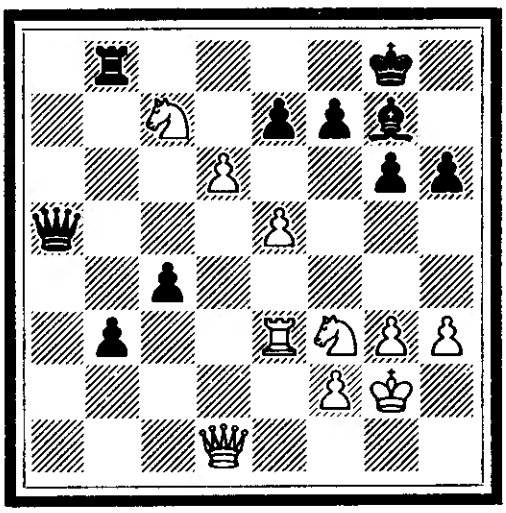
On 25 . . . Qa5? White would happily give back the piece: 26 Rxb3 Rxb3 27 Qxb3 Qxc7 28 Nd2, with a good game. Black preferred, correctly, to preserve his two connected pawns, rather than to regain his piece.

26 e5!

White cuts off the black bishop from the Q - side, and simultaneously prepares to create his own passed pawn.

26 . . . Qa5 27 d6 *(81)*

81



27 . . . b2!

If 27 . . . c3, then White's attack after 28 dxe7 could become very dangerous, e.g. 28 . . . c2 29 Qd8+ Rxd8 30 exd8=Q+ Kh7 31 Rxb3 c1=Q 32 Rb8, or 28 . . . Qxc7 29 Qd6 Qc8 30 Rxc3. The text move 27 . . . b2 creates an immediate threat (of queening), but it also somehow separates the passed pawns, and allows White to stop them by blockade.

28 Qb1?!

White's best try was to play 28 Nd2 c3 *(28 . . . exd6!?)* 29 Nb1 *(29 Nc4 Qc5)* 29 . . . Bxe5 30 Nd5 exd6 31 N5xc3 Rc8. Black is certainly much better, but White's defences aren't yet exhausted.

28 . . . c3 29 e6

I overlooked this move, which takes control of the c2 square - otherwise I would certainly have played 30 . . . Qf5. Still, Black should win without any great difficulty.

32 . . . Qxb1 33 Rxb1 Re8 34 Kf1

If 34 Nc2, Black continues 34 . . . Re2 35 Nfe1 d5 36 Kf1 Rd2, and the three connected pawns should eventually break through White's blockade and win.

34 . . . Bxd4!

Now White was threatening an effective blockade: Nc2 and Ne1-d3.

Therfore Black gives up his bishop, which has become less important with his passed pawns also on dark squares.

35 Nxd4 Re5 36 Kg2 Re4 37 Nc2 Kf7 38 Kf3 Re5 39 h4 Kf6

In time pressure, Black tries to reach the control at move 40.

40 Rd1 Ke6 41 g4 Rd5 42 Re1+ Kd7

Black's king goes to the support of his passed pawns. The game is over.

43 Na3 Rd3+ 44 Ke4 Rd2 45 f4 c2 46 Nxc2 Rxc2

This rook ending is an easy win for Black.

47 Rb1 Ke6 48 h5 gxh5 49 gxh5 Kf6 50 Kd5 Kf5 51 Kxd6 Kxf4 White resigns.

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Index of Openings